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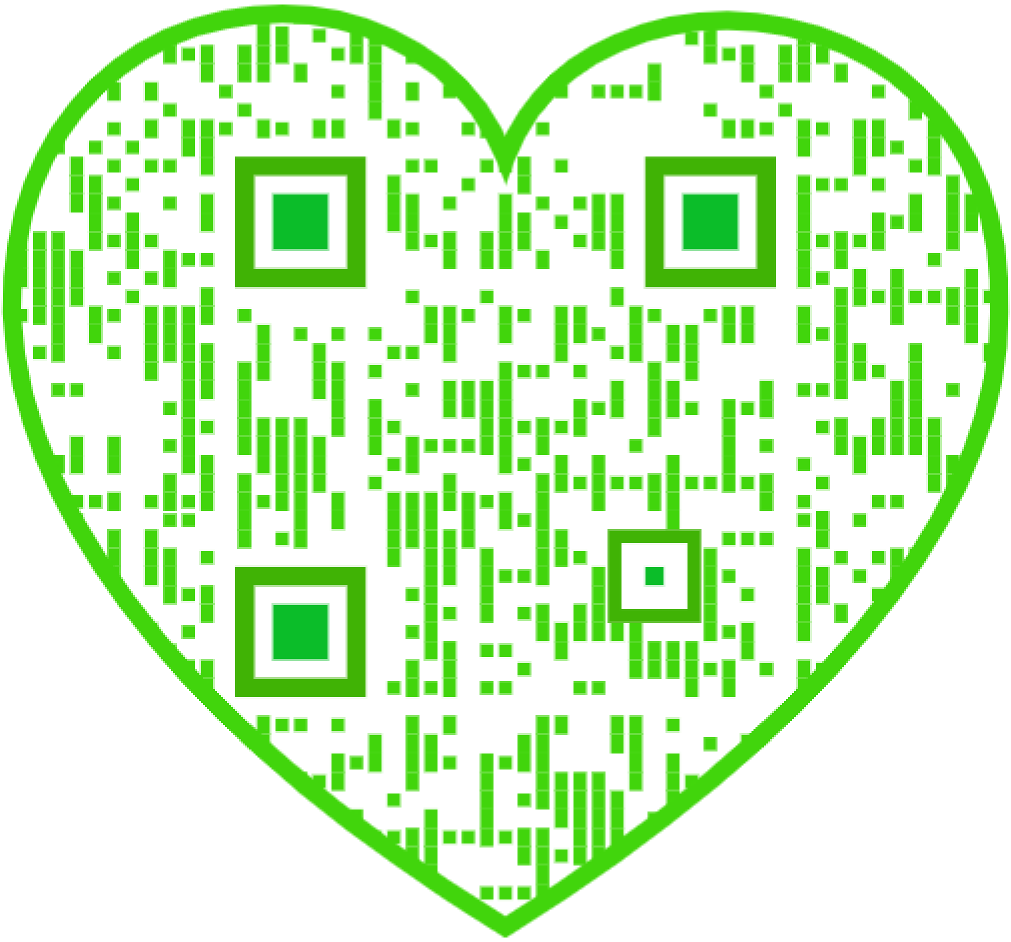

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COMMENT

CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM IS BREAKING OUT IN THE UK

Despite UK car production being at its lowest since 1954 (not counting a global pandemic blip), it doesn't seem as gloomy as the figures suggest (p10).

In fact, it feels a pivotal moment. Factories are retooling in a way never seen before to prepare for the onslaught of EVs, while the industry, government and consumers try to realise a zero-emissions future in a way that's good for the economy, individuals and the planet.

The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders predicts annual UK car production can rise above one million by 2028 and, while it's early days with the new government, the car industry is feeling cautiously optimistic about the way conversations could go on all things automotive. The outcome of the public consultation (p14) on the ZEV mandate will be telling and hopefully in a good way.

SMMT chief Mike Hawes is calling for consumer incentives on EVs as well as a strong industrial and trade strategy to safeguard automotive's future in the UK. We know of no new factories on the horizon but Hawes says there is more stability than in recent years and a highly skilled, innovative workforce, which means the UK remains attractive to foreign investors.

There feels a buoyancy despite the challenges – and that's an excellent starting point.

Rachel Burgess, magazine editor
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Meanwhile, online...

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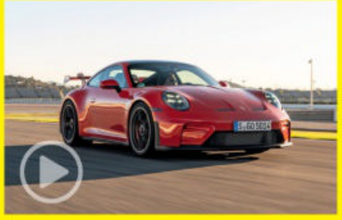

Porsche 911 GT3 in action

Whet your appetite with Matt Prior's story on p22 – then see and hear the new 911 GT3 on track in Spain.

XL1 vs Insight vs Prius

They were the future, once. But how do these former trailblazers stack up today? Join us on our YouTube channel to find out.

Tesla Model Y upgraded

Here's your first look at what could potentially be the best-selling electric car of 2025 - and, yes, it has indicator stalks!

Autocar (ISSN 1355-8293 USPS 25-185) is published weekly by Haymarket Media Group, Bridge House, 69 London Road, Twickenham, TW1 3SP, United Kingdom; haymarket.com; tel +44 (0)20 8267 5000

The US annual subscription price is $190.00. Airfreight and mailing in the US by agent named World Container Inc, 150-15, 183rd Street, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA. Periodicals postage paid at Brooklyn, NY 11256. US postmaster: Send address changes to Autocar, Air Business Ltd, c/o World Container Inc, 150-15, 183rd Street, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA. Subscription records are maintained at the above address. Air Business Ltd is acting as our mailing agent.

Autocar magazine is also published in Estonia, Greece, India, Japan, Latvia, Korea and Thailand.

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22 FIRST VERDICT ON THE PORSCHE 911 GT3

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GOT A STORY Email our news editor
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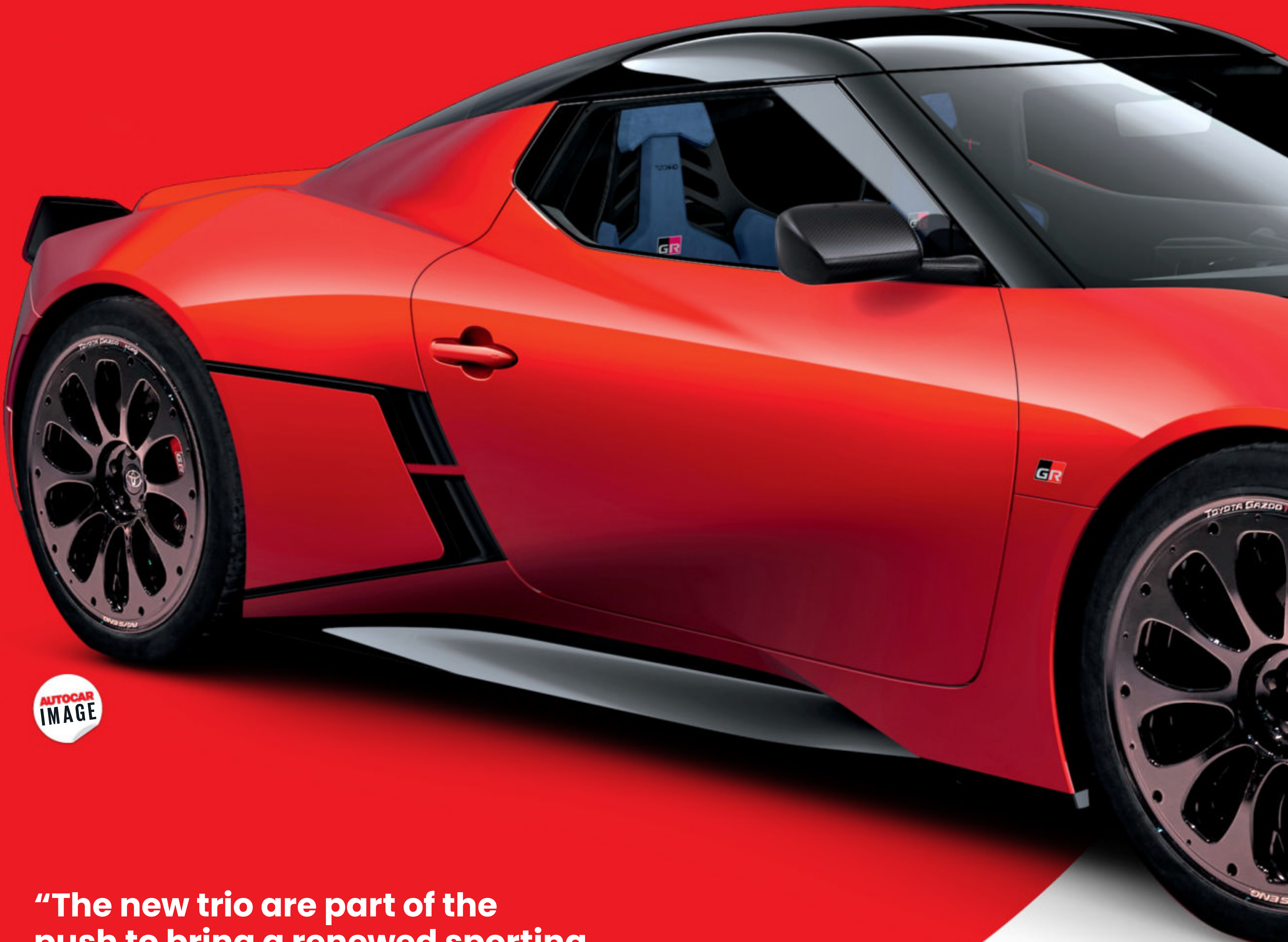
TOYOTA SET TO REVIVE MR2, CELICA AND LFA

Mid-engined MR2, 4WD Celica and V8 Lexus LFA successor on the way



> **"The new trio are part of the push to bring a renewed sporting appeal to Toyota showrooms"**

Toyota is gearing up for a three-pronged assault on the sports car market by reviving the legendary Celica and MR2 names and preparing a brand-new group flagship in the vein of the fire-breathing Lexus LFA.

The combustion-powered trio will form the backbone of a rebuilt sports car line-up, in essence filling gaps left by the GR Supra, which is at the end of its model life cycle globally, and the acclaimed GR86, whose time on sale in Europe was cut short by EU safety regulations.

Notably, the revival of the Celica and MR2 names, following the GR Supra, fulfils the ambition of company chairman Akio Toyoda to bring back the "three brothers". Together with the GR Yaris and the GR Supra, which is reported to be due to arrive in next-generation guise in the coming years, the new trio are part of the push to bring a renewed sporting appeal to Toyota showrooms.

The Celica and MR2 are set to be powered by a fiery new turbocharged four-cylinder petrol engine. Named G20E, it was revealed at the recent Tokyo Auto Salon. Reports suggest the engine can develop more than 400bhp in road-going form and top 600bhp in motorsport applications.

Curiously, the G20E made its public debut in a heavily modified GR Yaris, called the M Concept, where it was mounted not up front as usual but behind the rear seats. And despite the eccentric layout, it retained its four-wheel drive system, in similar fashion to the Group B rally cars of the 1980s such as the Ford RS200 and Lancia Delta S4.

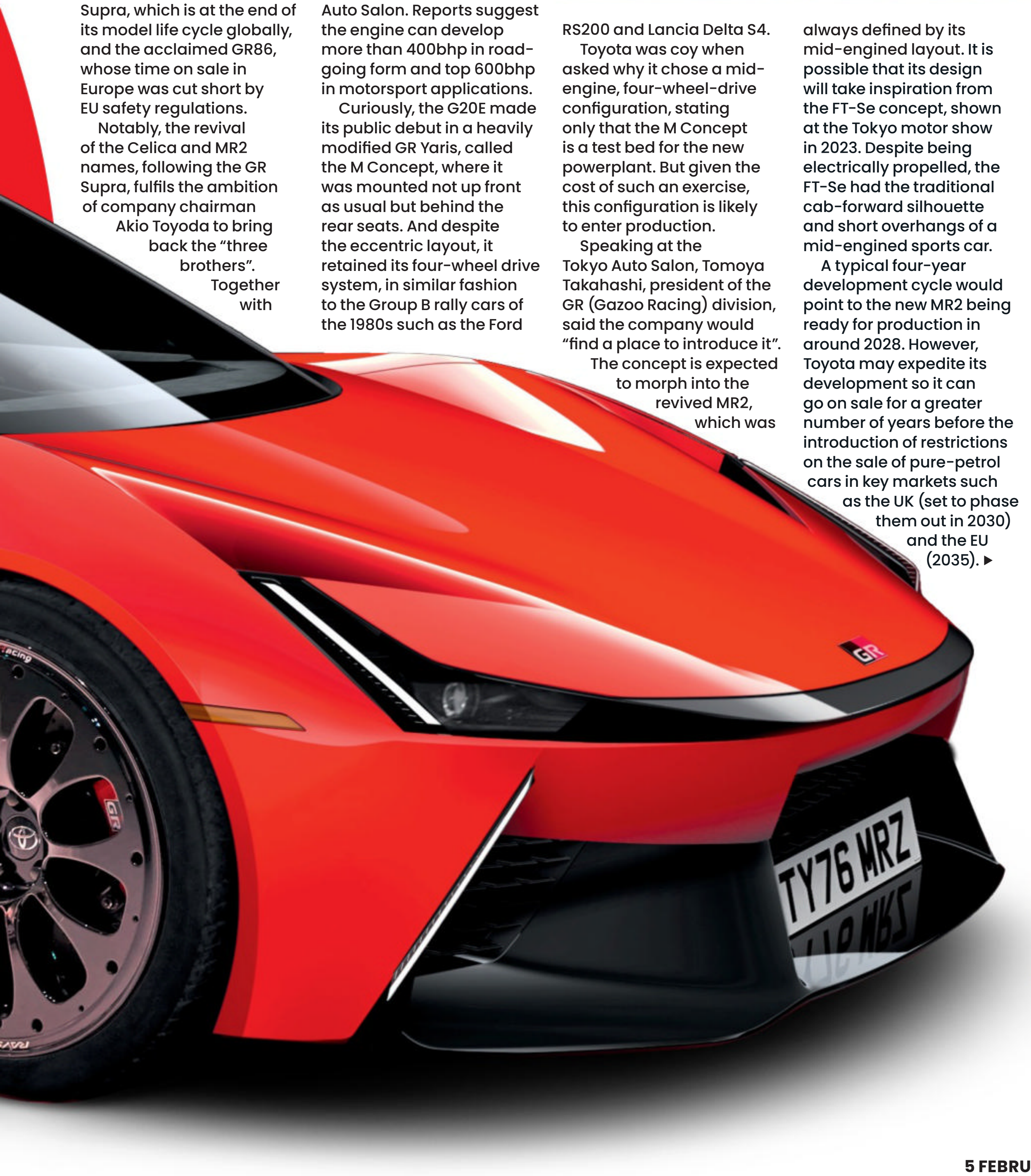
MR2s have been mid-engined since the very first version (pictured)

Toyota was coy when asked why it chose a mid-engine, four-wheel-drive configuration, stating only that the M Concept is a test bed for the new powerplant. But given the cost of such an exercise, this configuration is likely to enter production.

Speaking at the Tokyo Auto Salon, Tomoya Takahashi, president of the GR (Gazoo Racing) division, said the company would "find a place to introduce it".

The concept is expected to morph into the revived MR2, which was always defined by its mid-engined layout. It is possible that its design will take inspiration from the FT-Se concept, shown at the Tokyo motor show in 2023. Despite being electrically propelled, the FT-Se had the traditional cab-forward silhouette and short overhangs of a mid-engined sports car.

A typical four-year development cycle would point to the new MR2 being ready for production in around 2028. However, Toyota may expedite its development so it can go on sale for a greater number of years before the introduction of restrictions on the sale of pure-petrol cars in key markets such as the UK (set to phase them out in 2030) and the EU (2035). ▶



New MR2 will draw on the FT-Se concept's design and M Concept's tech

TOYOTA IS OFF THE LEASH FOR ITS NEW SPORTS CARS

JAMES ATTWOOD

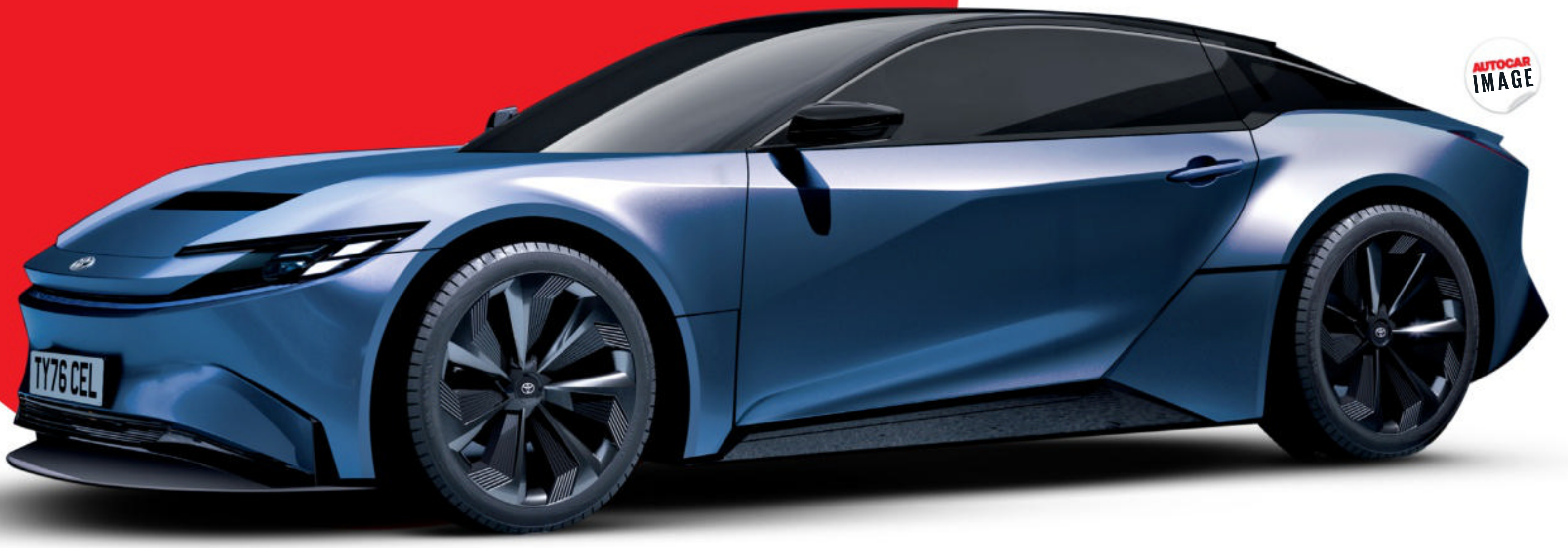
Making sports cars is hard and expensive, especially if you're a mainstream, mass-market car firm. That's why the GR86 and the Supra revival were only possible because Toyota had struck partnerships with Subaru and BMW respectively.

But with the wildly popular GR Yaris hot hatch, Toyota proved that it can do performance cars by itself and find enough of a market to justify the development outlay. This seems to have been a catalyst for the firm to take a more direct hands-on approach with its planned future line-up of sports cars.

Both the GR86 and Supra were great cars, but there's always going to be some compromise when a platform has to meet the approval of two manufacturers. The fact that Toyota seems to be going it alone suggests in future we'll get a much purer realisation of its sports car vision. That's an enticing prospect.

“It is possible the Celica could return to the WRC”

Reborn Celica is nearest to production and is expected to use 4WD



An earlier arrival would allow the MR2 to plug the hole left in Toyota’s GR line-up by the current-generation Supra. The A90 Final Edition model, limited to 300 examples globally, was unveiled in November last year.

Japanese publication Best Car has reported that the new Supra is due around 2027 and that it’s most likely to use a hybridised version of the G20E with rear-wheel drive – both to differentiate it from the Celica and to boost efficiency, which is crucial to the Supra’s brief in the GT4 racing category.

Following the same principle, the Celica – expected to be the first of the new trio to arrive – is most likely to use the powerplant mounted up front, but with four-wheel drive. Best Car has reported that it could reprise the GT-Four name that adorned homologation special versions of the Celica for the World Rally Championship in the 1980s and 1990s.

It’s even possible that the Celica could return to the World Rally Championship, after the FIA expanded the series’ regulations to allow a wider range of bodystyles from 2027: saloons, hatchbacks, SUVs and, crucially, “bespoke” designs. “Bodywork from almost any scaled production car [can] be fitted to the safety cell”, the governing body said.

Motorsport is also playing a major role in shaping the successor to the Lexus LFA, previewed by the GR GT3 concept that was unveiled three years ago.

The new supercar has been spotted running in both road-going and racing trim at circuits across Europe, including Spa-Francorchamps and the Nürburgring Nordschleife and it’s expected to be ready for top-flight competition in 2026.

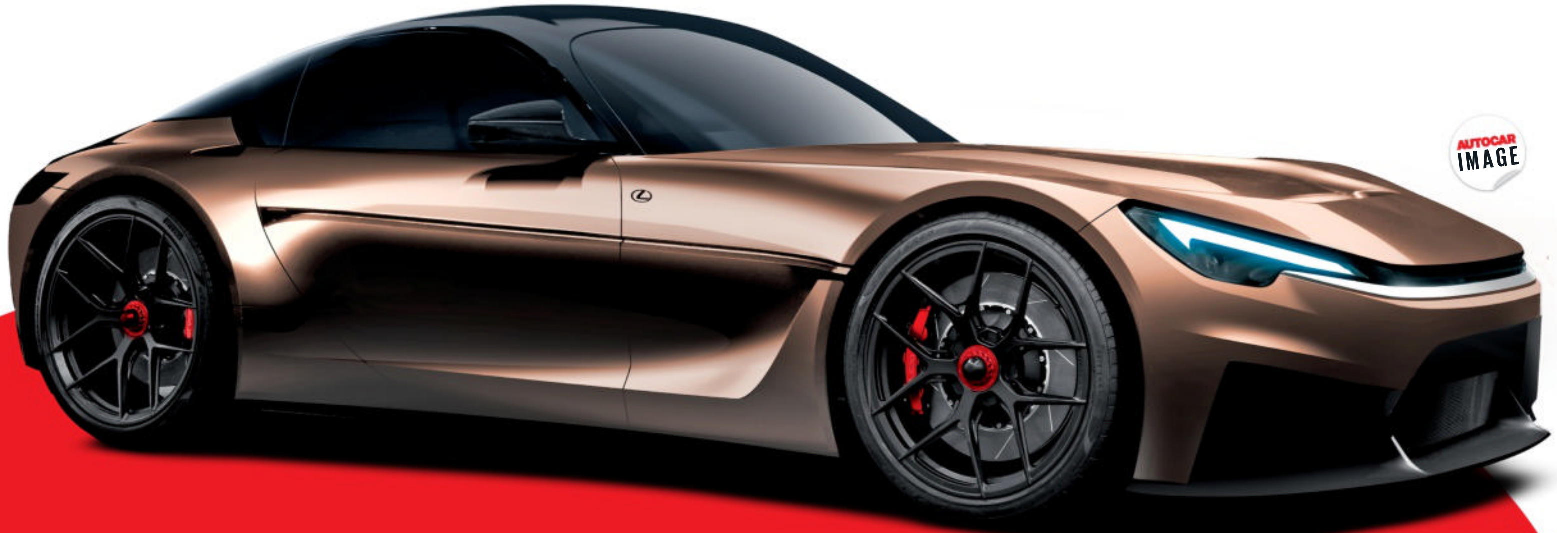
Notably, the FIA governing body’s homologation rules state that any GT3 racer must share its basic body design with a related road car, pointing to the arrival of a road car before the racer.

Like its forebear, the new Celica is likely to mount its engine in the front

Unlike the Celica and MR2, the new Lexus will be powered by a thunderous V8, which – unlike that in the outgoing Lexus LC grand tourer and the existing RC F coupé – is reported to breathe through twin turbochargers. It’s likely to produce around 500-600bhp in racing form and the car will weigh no more than 1300kg, given the limitations imposed by the GT3 ruleset.

The road car is expected to add an element of hybridisation. Autocar’s spy photographers have reported that prototypes move off silently from a standstill, with the engine firing up only a few metres later.

Toyota has yet to announce a name but it has trademarked ‘LFR’, which would reflect the car’s positioning as an LFA successor, as well as its high-performance billing.
CHARLIE MARTIN



New Lexus flagship is tipped to use a hybridised twin-turbo V8 engine

RENAULT STREAMLINER IN EV RANGE RECORD BID

One-off 1000kg single-seater uses advanced tech to boost efficiency

The Renault Filante Record 2025 has been created as a "laboratory on wheels" to push the boundaries of energy efficiency in EVs and uses new technology and materials that will trickle down into future production cars.

Weighing just 1000kg, the Filante Record 2025 has the goal of setting new records for distance travelled on a single charge and the learnings will be used by Renault to make its EVs as efficient as possible.

Key to breaking records is the Filante's slippery body. The single-seater's streamlined shape is inspired by the historic 40 CV des Records from the 1920s, the 1930s Nervasport des Records and the 1950s Étoile Filante ('Shooting Star'), which were all designed to break speed records.

Created in partnership with French racing specialist Ligier, the Filante's design optimises airflow around the body.

Its 3D-printed bespoke aluminium alloy can be created with extreme precision and cuts material waste.

The push for ultimate efficiency continues underneath with a special lightweight 87kWh battery. If the Filante can unlock more miles per kWh from the battery, this could result in production vehicles being fitted with smaller packs while still achieving the same range, thus lowering the cost of EVs.

Batteries continue to be highlighted by car makers as the biggest barrier to reducing electric car prices and account for a significant proportion of a vehicle's overall cost.

The Filante's 1000kg kerb weight (of which 60% is the battery) has been achieved through the use of ultra-light materials for the body, such as carbonfibre and a special high-strength aluminium alloy created through 3D printing. The chassis is made from a composite of aluminium, carbon and steel, which is light yet strong enough to keep the Filante safe and stable on track.

Renault also saved weight by fitting the Filante with steer-by-wire and brake-by-wire technologies, which cut down on mechanical components in the car. They also enable a new level of computer precision when braking and turning to further optimise efficiency. Both technologies are edging closer to use in production vehicles.

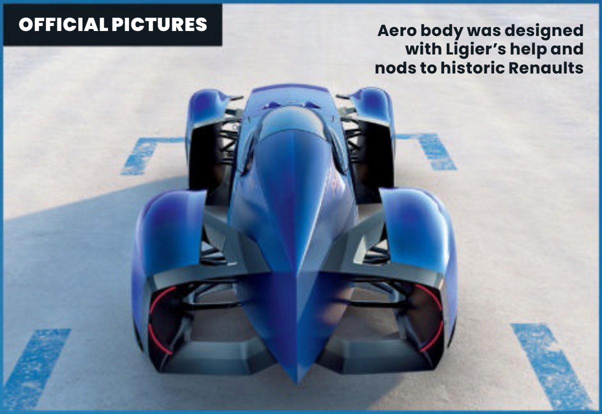
Elsewhere, the 19in wheels, normally a major source of "aerodynamic interference", according to Renault, have been designed to minimise the impact on airflow. These are shod with special Michelin tyres that are said to reduce energy dissipation. At the same time, the suspension arms have been tucked in to improve airflow.

The Filante is also meant to be a pretty design, said Sandeep Bhambra, Renault's director of advanced design, and to exhibit a look that "seeks to convey an impression of flow and lightness".

He added: "We designed this vehicle as a sculpture in motion. Inspired by fighter planes and the speed records of the 19th century, it reflects both performance and timeless elegance."

Renault will begin testing the Filante in the spring, at first in wind tunnels before the car is optimised for on-track testing.

WILL RIMELL


OFFICIAL PICTURES

Aero body was designed with Ligier's help and nods to historic Renaults

Tight cockpit is inspired by aviation and space travel. To reduce weight, the driver's seat is a hammock-style canvas item.

Single-seater uses steer-by-wire and brake-by-wire tech

Carbon-clad 87kWh battery weighs just 600kg as cells are integrated directly into the pack without intermediate modules to optimise space.

Filante measures 5.12m long – the same as a Range Rover – to allow for better control of the aerodynamic flow. It is also lower than a Citroën Ami.

Faired 19in wheels use special efficiency-focused Michelin tyres

NEW ASTON BOSS SPELLS OUT VISION FOR FUTURE

Hallmark wants more hybrids, more model variants and an EV by 2030

Aston Martin will rapidly expand its hybrid line-up and increase the number of model variants it offers in the coming years, according to new boss Adrian Hallmark – and it will launch its first electric vehicle before the end of this decade.

Former Bentley boss Hallmark took over as CEO of the sports car firm in September last year and has been working on a revised strategy for the coming decade.

Hallmark said he had been tempted into joining Aston because it was “an amazing brand” with “great potential, great shareholders and investment for the future, and a product portfolio we have never had before and couldn’t have dreamed of”.

The dramatic growth in the number of luxury car buyers in recent years has expanded Aston’s market potential, he said, and the key to its future success is that “the plan has got to be boring and stable. You can create the excitement around you, but you don’t create excitement by ripping the plan up every five minutes.”

Hallmark: “You don’t create excitement by ripping the plan up every five minutes”

ELECTRIFICATION

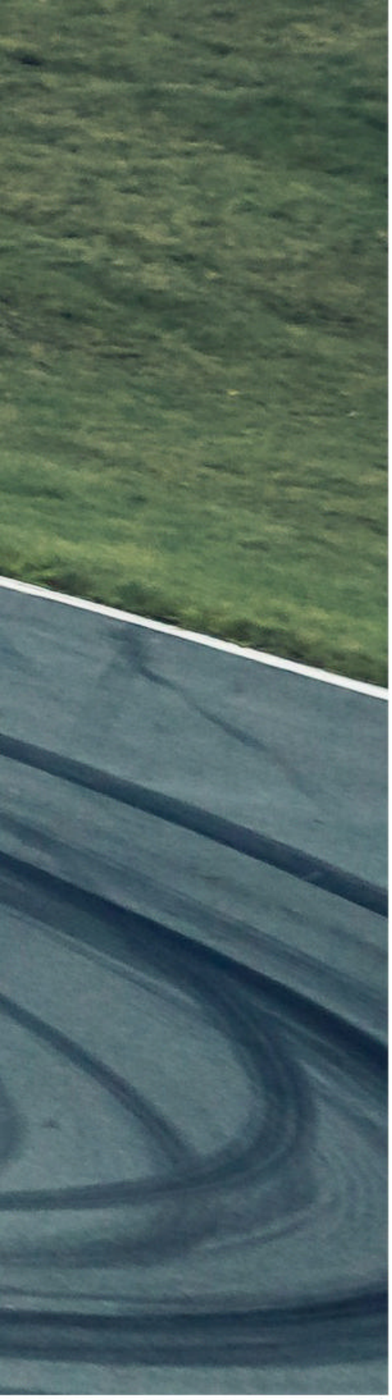
Previous Aston management touted plans to use plug-in hybrid powertrains as a ‘transitional’ technology on the firm’s path to electrification. Speaking to a select group of reporters, including Autocar, Hallmark said the electrification pathway is “not as clear-cut as three or five years ago, but the general direction is absolutely towards electrification. Our commitment is towards carbon-neutral or net zero. But to get there we will double down and add incremental products in the hybrid space before we get to full electric.”

Nevertheless, Hallmark insisted Aston’s first EV will arrive “in this decade”. Previous management had set a date of 2027 but Hallmark said he had questioned that even before starting his role and he refused to be drawn on a specific date.

He added that “we have all the prerequisites defined, and some of them developed” for the first EV models. Aston has a deal to use US EV firm Lucid’s electric motor, battery control systems and inverters for its EVs.

Asked by Autocar whether the first EV will be a new model or a variant of an existing one, Hallmark said: “For a company of our size, you have to either replace an existing nameplate and take the brave pill, or create the niche [and do] an incremental model as the first one. We haven’t fully decided. The original plan was to go with an incremental model, but we’re looking to other options.”

The approach is about being “flexible” over the next 10 years, said Hallmark. He expects combustion models “with some form of electrification” to account for the bulk of sales until 2030, with the firm eventually becoming “full



electric some time between 2035 and 2040”.

He said: “We’re not resisting. We’re just taking account of legislation and trying to manage through a period of high risk for a small company. We can’t afford to do engines, hybrids and electric cars and just see which ones work and then turn off the factories of the others.”

CONSOLIDATION

Hallmark joined Aston shortly after one of the biggest product offensives in its history, including the new DB12, Vantage and Vanquish, along with the Valkyrie hypercar. Hallmark said he had “never seen as much ambition in 18 months” and “there’s no way any of the brands I’ve been associated with before would have tried that”.

He acknowledged that the rollout of those models hadn’t been as smooth as anticipated due to that compressed cycle and he hinted that, EV aside, further new model lines won’t arrive until after 2030. Instead, the focus will be on maximising the potential of the brand’s existing models.

AUTOCAR IMAGE

Aston Martin’s first EV will arrive before the end of this decade

Hallmark said Aston’s limited provision of model variants means it risks existing buyers going elsewhere. He cited the example of Porsche, which offers numerous variants of the Vantage-rivalling 911.

“At the moment, customers buy a Vantage, DB12 or DBX and keep it for two years or so, which is the average ownership cycle in the luxury segment,” said Hallmark. “So in two years’ time, there’s got to be a reason to buy a better Vantage, and then two years after that an even better Vantage. We’ve never had the intensity of life-cycle innovation that we need, and if our competition are doing it and we’re not, we’ll never be as successful as we could.”

This approach will include substantially expanding the list of high-end options available to buyers by around 100. Hallmark said: “If we can add those and have normal levels of uptake, the per-year improvement in our bottom line, and more importantly in meeting customer needs, is massive.”

> **“If rivals are doing it and we’re not, we’ll never be as successful as we could”**

MID-ENGINED CARS

As part of its luxury push to rival Ferrari, Aston has moved into the mid-engined supercar sphere in recent years, with the Adrian Newey-designed Valkyrie and the upcoming Valhalla.

Newey now works for Aston’s F1 team, and while Hallmark didn’t rule out an eventual Valkyrie successor, he said developing that sort of boundary-pushing model is “a once in a seven- or 10-year cycle” project. He added: “Not many car companies can afford, financially or emotionally, to do a car that is so far ahead of themselves and everybody else every year. It would kill you.”

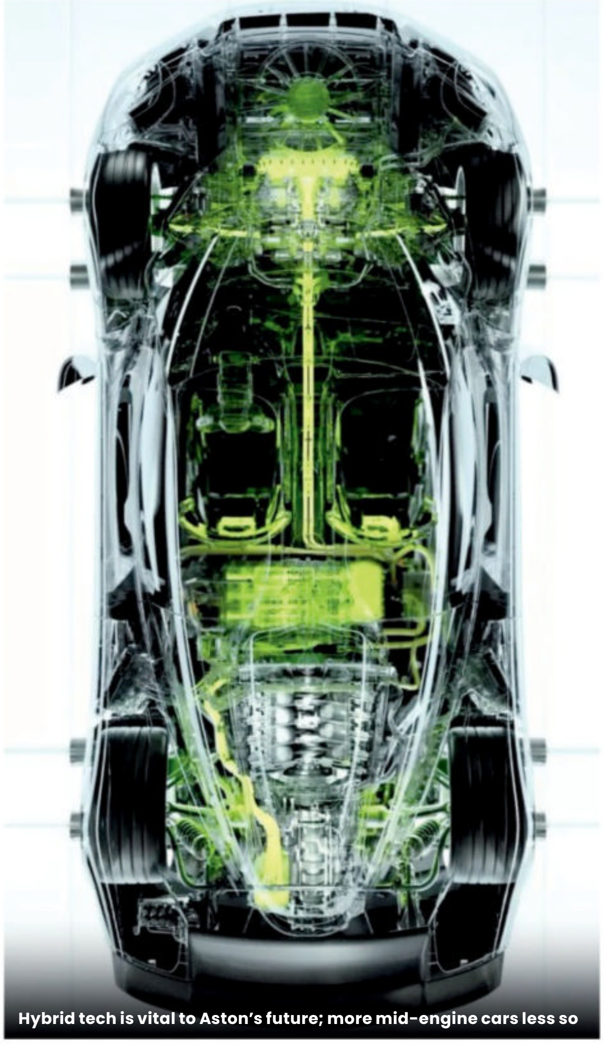
He was non-committal on a Valhalla successor, suggesting its platform can’t be used for a lower-priced version.

FAITH IN THE DBX

Hallmark is confident the DBX SUV will eventually succeed, despite lower than expected sales so far. He compared it to Bentley’s struggles with the Bentayga in the first few years after its launch and said there is still work to do on raising awareness of the model.

He added: “If 52% of the luxury segment is SUV, then we need an SUV. [The DBX] hasn’t done everything it needs to do yet. Watch this space in the next one to three years. We’re going to attack through the life cycle.”

JAMES ATTWOOD



Hybrid tech is vital to Aston’s future; more mid-engine cars less so

Hallmark hinted strongly at expanding the DBX’s appeal

TRICK TO MAKE EV FEEL LIKE V12 HYPERCAR

Aston Martin could use oscillating body structures on its first EV to simulate the experience of driving a V12, Adrian Hallmark has hinted.

Asked how Aston can produce a true electric performance car in the future, Hallmark ruled out the use of fake gearshifts or engine noises, saying that he recently drove the Mercedes-AMG EQS “and that gave me hope” because “it resonates – I don’t mean emotionally, but physically”.

He added: “If you mapped the telemetry of the V12 engine from the Valkyrie, measured the frequencies and built those into the body structure of the vehicle linked to the throttle position and suppressed the electrical frequency noises, you’d feel exactly like you were in a Valkyrie.

“So I believe without fake noises but by actually oscillating body structures and other structures with the frequencies that you get from a combustion powertrain, you can create an emotional connection.”

Hallmark also hinted that weight reduction will be a key objective for future performance EVs, citing solid-state batteries as crucial in that aim. He added that four-wheel steering and torque-vectoring systems will also help to offset the inherent extra weight of an EV.

MINI PLANT OXFORD.
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UK CAR PRODUCTION SINKS TO NEW LOW

Total for 2024 was smallest for 70 years – but industry says it's just a blip

British vehicle production fell by 12% last year and is set to fall further this year – but industry chiefs insist that it's a short-term blip, caused by factories being retooled to build new electric models.

The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders announced that 905,233 vehicles were produced in the UK in 2024, comprising 779,584 cars and 125,649 commercial vehicles.

That represents a 14% year-on-year fall in car production but a 4% rise in commercial vehicle production, resulting in an overall decrease of 12%.

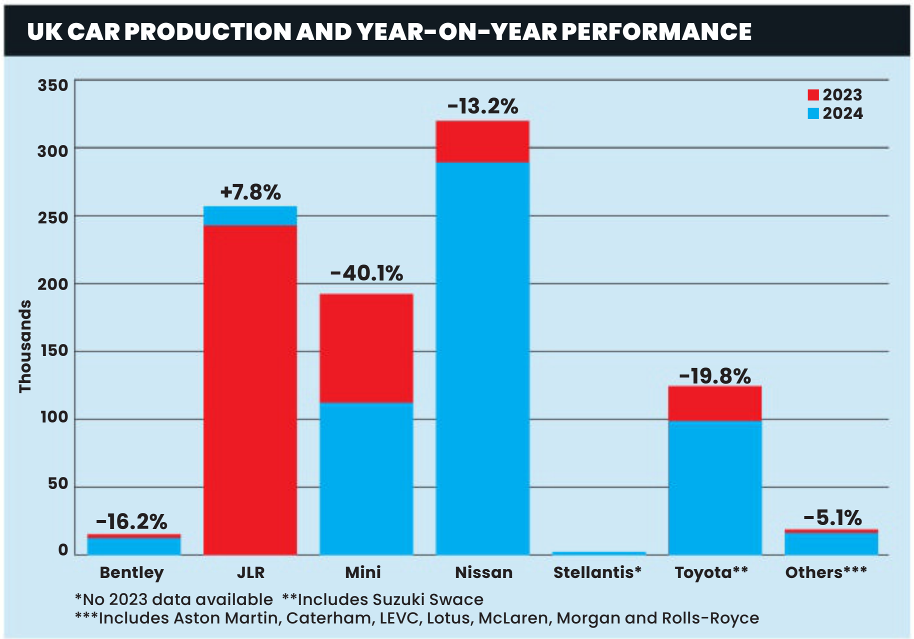
It is the lowest number of cars made in the UK since 1954, excluding 2020 – an anomaly as a result of the Covid pandemic.

Nor is the outlook for 2025 any rosier. In fact, car and van production is predicted to fall further to 839,000 as manufacturers continue to transform factories for EV production.

However, SMMT CEO Mike Hawes told Autocar that he expected the 2026 figure to increase above that from 2024, with the large-scale transition due to be complete by then and many more models running off the production lines.

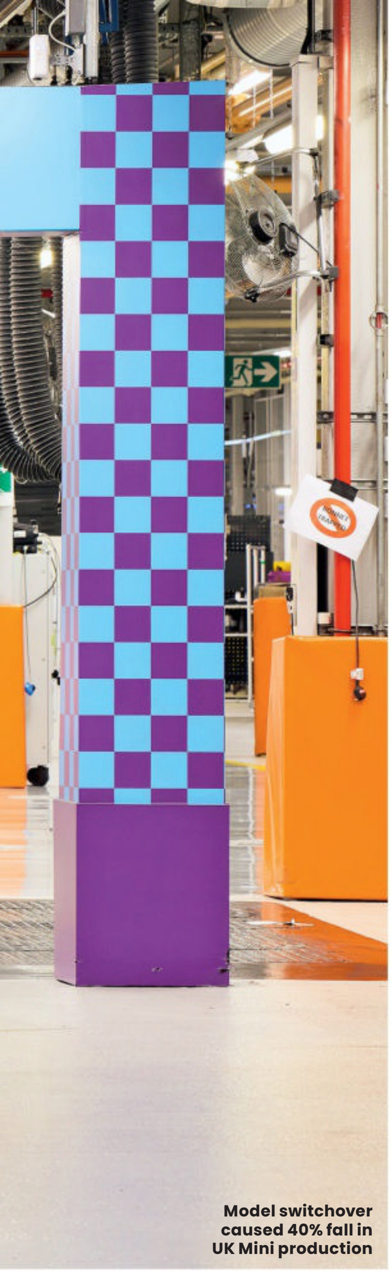
He said there is potential for the UK to get back above a million units in 2028 but this is dependent on "global demand improving, positive economic conditions and greater consumer confidence".

JLR was the only major car maker to increase UK production last year



UK CAR PRODUCTION AND YEAR-ON-YEAR PERFORMANCE

*No 2023 data available **Includes Suzuki Swace
***Includes Aston Martin, Caterham, LEVC, Lotus, McLaren, Morgan and Rolls-Royce



Model switchover caused 40% fall in UK Mini production

JLR BUCKS THE NEGATIVE TREND

In 2024, the number of vehicles built by Nissan, Mini, Toyota and Bentley all fell. JLR stands out as the only maker whose production rose - by 8%.

This was fuelled by the success of Range Rover, compensating for JLR ending all Jaguar car production during the year.

Figures for smaller brands such as Aston Martin, Lotus, McLaren and Rolls-Royce aren't listed individually in the published SMMT figures.

Nearly 80% of cars were exported, of which more than half (54%) went to Europe, 16.9% to the US and 6.6% to China.

Hawes said: "Amid significant geopolitical and trade tensions, UK manufacturers are set on turning billions of pounds of investment into production reality, transforming factories to make new electric vehicles for sale around the world.

"Growing pains are inevitable, so the drop in volumes last year is not surprising. With new models and battery production on the horizon, the potential for growth is clear.

"Securing this future requires industrial and trade strategies that deliver the competitive conditions essential for growth amidst an increasingly protectionist global environment."

Mini, whose production volume fell by 40% as a result of the company currently not building the electric version of the Cooper hatchback at Oxford, told Autocar that its volume was "as planned".

Bentley, whose output dropped by 16%, said its "performance was slightly reduced against previous years due to difficult market conditions and the result of life-cycle effects as we transition to new models recently introduced". The firm added that it expected an uplift at Crewe in 2025.

THE EV STRUGGLE

Of all vehicles built in the UK in 2024, a third were electrified, down 20% on the previous year. That fall runs counter to the trajectory of the zero-emission vehicle mandate, which requires manufacturers to sell 28% EVs in their model mix this year, up from 22% last year and rising to 80% by 2030.

The ZEV mandate is currently the industry's biggest challenge, as car makers argue that there isn't sufficient consumer demand for them to reach the mandated proportions.

The mandate is currently open to public consultation, but any decision is unlikely to be made in time to have a significant impact on the industry's targets for 2025.

Hawes said he was hopeful that the result might be "some flexibility" on the sale of hybrid cars, amid uncertainty over exactly which types can be sold in the UK from 2030 to 2035.

He also repeated calls for consumer incentives, which are considered crucial to the uptake of EVs – namely that the 20% VAT levied on public charging instead matches the 5% on private charging and that the expensive car supplement, applied to any vehicle over £40,000, is either removed for EVs or the threshold significantly raised.

RACHEL BURGESS

DOES TRUMP POSE A THREAT?

The US is the UK car industry's second-biggest export market, led by demand for British luxury and supercar brands.

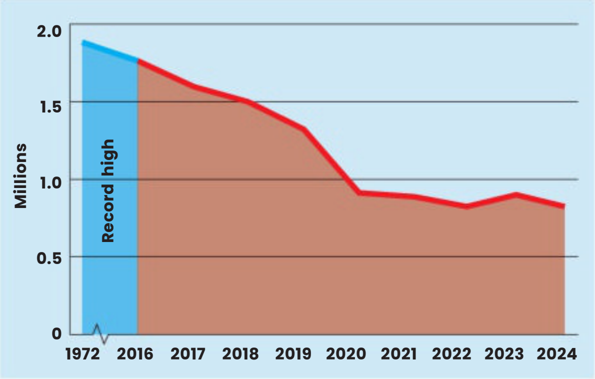
SMMT boss Mike Hawes remains cautious about the impact that new US president Donald Trump may have.

He said: "It's early days. The US approach to tariffs is on a market-by-market basis. There is nowhere else that makes high-luxury vehicles like the UK. If tariffs were imposed, that would put up the vehicle prices, which isn't good for the American consumer and is inflationary. We hope it can be avoided.

"The industry is watching to see what happens before drawing any conclusions."

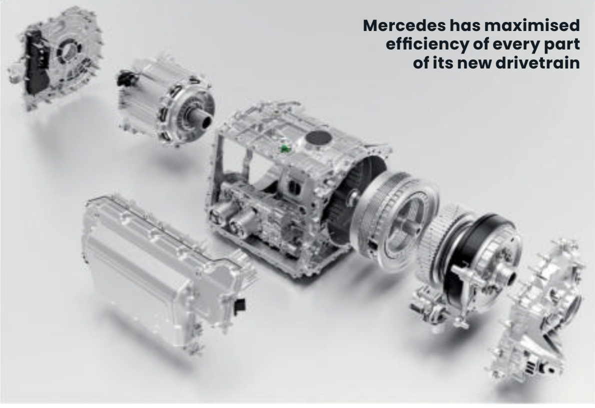
TEXT MICHIGAN TO 88022
TRUMP

THE DECLINE OF UK CAR MANUFACTURING



Next big thing

JESSE CROSSE



Mercedes has maximised efficiency of every part of its new drivetrain

HOW MERCEDES' NEW CLA WILL CHANGE THE EV GAME

WHEN MERCEDES-BENZ first showed the Concept CLA in 2023, it coined the phrase "the one-litre car of the electric age", highlighting the lengths it was going to in achieving 93% efficiency between the battery and the driving wheels.

The new CLA EV is due later this year, and with a potential range of 466 miles it will consume energy at a rate of 12kWh every 62 miles, or more than five miles for a single kWh. On the UK's cheapest domestic energy tariffs, that would equate to about 1.3p per mile for fuel.

To achieve that, Mercedes is using every trick in the EV book, with a drive system based on the Vision EQXX concept's technology.

The basic CLA EV will have a single rear motor with a two-speed reduction transmission. Although more than one speed isn't essential for a motor, some manufacturers opt for them on at least one axle. In this case, Mercedes argues the short (11:1) first gear gives better initial acceleration than a single fixed ratio, along with improved towing capacity and superior efficiency in urban traffic.

The second ratio (5:1) improves efficiency at motorway speeds, and shift points are decided by software to eke out maximum efficiency in any given situation, the selected driving programme and battery state of charge.

The first gear is selected by a mechanical dog or 'claw' engagement and the second by a plated clutch, and shifts are claimed to be indiscernible.

The 268bhp motor is of the permanent magnet type (used by most EVs for its high efficiency and performance), but Mercedes claims the rare-earth content of the magnets is so small as to be insignificant.

Said to be "remarkably quiet", it has the latest hairpin windings and its magnets inserted into the rotor in a 'double-V' (as if one on top of the other). The idea is to concentrate the magnetic flux, improving torque density compared with other methods.

The inverter is based on silicon-carbide chips – a premium technology that has been steadily introduced over the past few years for its high efficiency.

4Matic models will have an additional single-speed 107bhp drive unit on the front axle to give four-wheel drive when it's needed.

To avoid energy-sapping drag from the motor and its transmission, there's a mechanical disconnect unit, much like in many ICE cars' 4WD systems.

The front motor has its own silicon-carbide inverter and both the front and rear motors can perform regenerative braking.

Despite being billed as an entry-level EV, the battery and electrical architecture runs at 800V so the battery can be charged at 320kW. This was claimed to enable the Concept CLA to gain 186 miles of range in 10 minutes.

AUTOCAR IMAGE
EV25 CLA

GETTY IMAGES

GENESIS TO PRESS THE RESET BUTTON IN 2025

Hyundai-owned premium brand is going EV-only as its first customers' cars come up for renewal

Genesis is gearing up for what will be a pivotal year in the UK, as it ends sales of new pure-combustion cars and repositions itself following a turbulent four years since launching here.

The Hyundai-owned Korean premium brand has sold just 3700 cars in the UK to date. That's 6000 fewer than DS – a brand of a similar positioning and age and in a similar state of flux – sold over the same period.

What's more, Polestar, a rival firm that was launched a year earlier, has sold nearly 10 times as many cars – and with a single model.

With the petrol- and diesel-engined G70, GV70 and GV80 models now available from stock only and future hybrid models promised but with no arrival date yet confirmed, Genesis is effectively going electric-only here for the foreseeable future.

1210
Number of cars Genesis sold in UK in 2024

All of its EVs are due to be refreshed this year and new ones, such as the GV60 Magma, will follow as part of a renewed EV push.

Although the decision was almost certainly made due to those ICE models' poor sales compared with their electric counterparts (EVs have accounted for more than two-thirds of Genesis's total UK sales), it comes at a particularly challenging moment for the brand, as many of its early adopters' finance and lease deals come up for renewal.

"Every one of our sales, even today, is a conquest," Jonny Miller, brand director at Genesis Motor UK, told Autocar.

In a bid to entice owners into an EV, the brand currently offers electric courtesy cars to customers while their ICE models are in for service, so they can see how they live with it.

Although taking an EV isn't compulsory, Miller described these short loans (sometimes one to two days in duration) as opportunities to open his customers' minds to the prospect of running one in the long term.

299
Number of ICE cars Genesis sold in UK in 2024

"We will fully charge it, so [customers] can live with it, understand how it drives and how it feels but live with it for a little bit, like an extended test drive," said Miller.

"So we're actually using a natural life cycle-ownership model to get customers into cars that they possibly would not have driven or thought about and into our latest and greatest product."

As for those who can't see an EV in their immediate

The Mk5 LS is a very rare sight in the UK, unlike its forebears

LEXUS LS TAKEN OFF SALE IN THE UK AS DEMAND TUMBLES

THE LEXUS LS, the first car launched by the Japanese luxury brand here 35 years ago, has been dropped from its UK line-up.

This follows a sustained period of poor sales of the Mercedes-Benz S-Class rival: just 39 had been sold since the turn of the decade, including only three in 2024.

It means the ES is the only Lexus saloon still sold here.

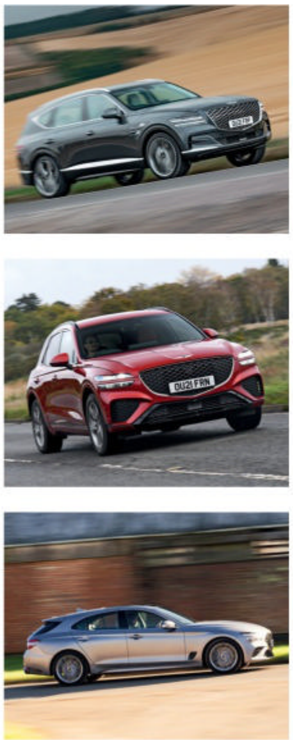
Homologation and legislation issues also contributed to the demise of the LS, a Lexus spokesperson told Autocar, as did the popularity of the brand's newly introduced LM MPV, which targets a similar market.

The LS continues to be sold in other European markets and can still be bought from stock in the UK.

Before going off sale, the LS line-up ranged from £101k to £128k in Takumi guise.

Every LS was powered by a hybrid system comprising a 3.5-litre V6 petrol engine, two electric motors and a lithium ion battery. This combined for 354bhp and a top-end 0-62mph time (when four-wheel drive was optioned in) of 5.4sec.

Lexus's decision brings



Top to bottom: ICE GV80, GV70 and G70 are now history in the UK

future, Miller pointed to the remainder of Genesis cars in stock, which have been distributed between model lines according to previous demand.

"We didn't want to just sort of say 'sorry, you have to have an EV now'," he said. "We wanted to give them the opportunity to come back and take a second ICE product before it does go. They may be the people that then step into that hybrid [in a few years] and then step into the battery-electric vehicle further down the line."

Genesis's shift in focus coincides with a drastic change to its sales model, initiated last year. It went from selling cars from three 'spaces' in shopping centres (two in London and one in Edinburgh) to an agency retail model fulfilled by dealer partners across the country.

That added another 11 retailers to its network – enough, according to Hyundai Motor UK boss Ashley Andrew, to reach the majority of the UK's car buyers.

"The point of difference will be what it means for the customer," Andrew said previously. "It will mean a great deal more convenience, because when we get to 15 partners, [customers] will have that proximity to Genesis. We will be able to reach about 90% of the car-buying market. Our guideline is that you will be able to reach a Genesis retailer within an hour's drive time."

Despite Genesis's moves to bolster sales, the customer remains king, suggested Miller. "What we don't want to do is all of a sudden sell huge amounts of cars but make no one happy, because they won't come back and buy a new one," he said.

"What we're trying to do is secure a customer who wants to own a Genesis because they appreciate the five-year care plan, the scheduled servicing and the we-come-to-you service.

"If you have a Genesis and it needs scheduled servicing, we will actually come to you and give you a Genesis courtesy car."

It seems, then, that 2025 won't be a year of growth for Genesis in the UK but one of consolidation – and that could prove its trickiest challenge yet.

CHARLIE MARTIN

£54,105
Current price of the cheapest Genesis model, the GV60

GENESIS EVs COMING SOON

Electrified G80
Extra range and new option of an extended wheelbase from April.

Electrified GV70
SUV gets fresh styling and more range. Due this summer.

GV60
Compact crossover is restyled inside and out. Also due this summer.

GV60 Magma
Brand's first hot EV will build on sibling Hyundai's Ioniq 5 N and cost up to £100k.

Grapevine

MARK TISSHAW

Can CEO Ficili give mainstream Alfas a flavour of the 33 Stradale?

SANTO FICILI ISN'T sure of exactly how many Alfas he has owned in the past. "There's a long list," the new Alfa Romeo CEO says, the most recent being a Giulia. "I've been in love with the brand since I was a kid."

Ficili's rise to the top job at the car maker he loves the most is a heart-warming story. His early roles at the Fiat Group in the 1980s and 1990s included stints as a workshop manager and prepping cars for delivery to customers. He has lived the brand, and when he says he loves it, he means it.

He inherits a firm that has long been a maker of great cars without being a great car maker. Indeed, Alfa is the industry's biggest opportunity or biggest problem, depending on how full or empty your glass is.

Alfa has gone all sensible since the 2021 formation of Stellantis. It's now profitable. It's launching new cars to a set product plan at the time it said it would. The quality of its cars has improved, reducing warranty claims.

Yet if you dig deeper into Alfa's return to profitability, you discover that it comes following the decision to write off the hundreds of millions of euros it cost to develop the Giorgio platform that underpins the Giulia and Stelvio.

This was supposed to underpin as many as eight Alfas between 2014 and 2018 on the brand's way to 400,000 global sales, from a baseline of just over 70,000 in 2013. While it has gone on to underpin some Maseratis (a brand that Ficili also now leads) and Jeeps, it won't be used for any more Alfas.

Ficili is relatively happy with global sales of 62,000 in 2024, despite that being fewer than when Alfa seemed to be at death's door. For context, Peugeot sold more cars in the UK last year. Just 1005 Alfas found a UK home last year, yet Ficili says there's no question over viability, because the cost of right-hand-drive engineering is absorbed into the profit margins of left-hookers. "We must be present in the UK," he says.

Ficili is even happier with Alfa's margins – although those remain confidential, as Stellantis doesn't break out brands' performances.

He says opportunities for growth are entering more markets, improving the dealer network and adding another model line – an SUV larger than the Stelvio.

Being able to benefit from the economies of scale of shared Stellantis platforms for the likes of the Tonale and Junior is doing wonders for Alfa and giving it a stable base on which to build.

While such cars appeal to the head more than many Alfas before, their commonality in how they drive with other Stellantis models is disappointing.

> **"Alfa has made great cars but not been a great car maker"**

The next Giulia and Stelvio will sit on shared platforms, too, and even the limited-run 33 Stradale is closely related to Maserati's MC20.

It's odd for Alfa to be in a position where its existence isn't in question but its excitement is. With his knowledge of and passion for the brand, Ficili will know this deep down. At least he is in the right place to do something about it.

to an end a lineage that began in the UK in 1990, with the launch of its first-ever model, the LS 400 (below).

This limo was used to position the Toyota offshoot as a maker of refined luxury cars that could take on the European and American elite at a cheaper starting price.

LS first arrived here 35 years ago

THE CAR THAT MADE THE BRAND

MATT PRIOR

In the mid-1990s, an NVH engineer came to talk to my automotive engineering degree class. He was asked who made the world's most refined car. He didn't want to say it was one of his rivals but did admit the Lexus LS 400 had shaken up the market.

It felt like a landmark car, even then – the sort of car that should feature in those daft 'cars you must own/drive before you die' lists.

New premium badges have come and gone, but I think Lexus succeeded because the original LS set new standards for luxury, reliability and customer service.

It's a shame it will no longer be the flagship.

HOW SHOULD THE GOV'T HANDLE ICE PHASE-OUT?

The UK government is seeking views and you can give yours. Here's ours

Ever since 2020, when then prime minister Boris Johnson first outlined plans to ban the sale of new non-zero-emission cars from 2030 onwards, there has been more confusion than clarity.

Under various subsequent UK governments, the date has moved from 2030 to 2035 and back, and all the while there has been a plan to allow the sale of certain hybrids – although nobody has yet specified exactly which sort.

For car firms used to planning years in advance, it has been hugely problematic. For car buyers, this huge dollop of uncertainty has left many unsure what they should buy, or when.

But the current government has promised certainty, with a pledge to reinstate that 2030 date – and while some hybrids will be allowed on sale until 2035, there's now finally a promise to specify details.

At the same time, the government is looking at refining some aspects of the zero-emission vehicle (ZEV) mandate, which requires firms to sell an increasing percentage of EVs to avoid punitive fines. With the targets running ahead of consumer demand, it warped the market in 2024.

The first step to clarity is an ongoing government consultation, which seeks feedback on various aspects of the ICE phase-out and ZEV mandate. As we did with the original 2020 consultation (1 July 2020) Autocar feels it is vital to make our voice heard and we have submitted our own response.

We have included the key aspects of our response to the 17 questions in the consultation here: you can read our full submission online.

Autocar wants small-scale makers to be exempt from 2030 rules

Do you agree with the government's view that full hybrid and plug-in hybrid technologies only should be considered? Please explain your answer.

Autocar supports the electrification of the UK car parc, both as a way of cutting emissions in our towns and cities and eliminating the CO_2 output of cars and vans on UK roads. It is clear to us, and the wider car industry, that these are desirable outcomes. However, there are technologies other than HEV and PHEV that are also low- or zero-emission capable at the tailpipe – such as hydrogen fuel cell, hydrogen combustion and synthetic e-fuels. We would support a framework that encourages innovation in different energy sources that might prove viable in the long term.

Do you prefer a technological definition that permits both HEVs and PHEVs, or a technological definition that permits PHEVs only? Please explain your answer.

We would prefer a definition that sets standards, rather than enforcing specific solutions. For example, as the legislation is written

ICE BAN MANIFESTO

NO, PRIME MINISTER

The UK government's proposal to ban sales of all cars that aren't fully electric by as early as 2032 is, in Autocar's view, both unrealistic and potentially highly damaging. So we've drawn up our own manifesto for entering the electric age

"We enthusiastically welcome the EV age, but the laws promoting it must be more imaginative and sensitive"

Autocar also voiced its opinion during the original government consultation on this topic, back in 2020

at the moment, range-extender electric vehicle technology, which is rapidly taking off in China, is effectively banned in the UK before it even has a chance to launch. It should not be down to legislators to prescribe the solution to the problem, as has happened with a legislative path now that only leads to battery-electric vehicles. While the goal may ultimately be zero emissions, the focus should be on reducing CO_2 emissions, and the more technologies that can contribute to that the better.

Should a minimum range be required for new PHEVs and, if so, at what level should it be set? Please explain your answer.

We do not believe a minimum range should be set for PHEVs because we do not believe that figure is truly meaningful. While a PHEV might be capable of extending zero-emission running and manufacturers should be encouraged to increase this where possible, if the vehicle is not charged regularly and used correctly, that figure is essentially meaningless.

What are your views on current measures to support demand for zero-emission vehicles? What additional measures could further support the transition?

While the current tax benefits for fleet and business buyers of zero-emission vehicles have proven effective, there is no support to drive demand for zero-emission vehicles for private buyers at present. This has created an imbalanced car market, with business buyers accounting for the vast majority of EV sales.

That needs to be addressed with increased support for private buyers, either through incentives or tax benefits – particularly for more affordable EVs now arriving on the market. Even a small incentive can serve as a strong push to consumers and help to address the price gap that remains between ICE vehicles and EVs.

This must also be joined up with the wider policy for road transport taxation. In the most recent budget, VED rates were raised on new ICE cars while fuel duty was frozen. Throw in the lack of incentives to buy electric cars and together these three things simply encourage people to stay in their existing cars for longer and opportunities are missed to reduce CO_2 and increase the number of zero-emissions vehicles on the road.

New laws shouldn't inhibit tech like FCEVs and range-extenders

Government needs to incentivise private buyers to switch to EVs

> **"It should not be down to legislators to prescribe the solution to the problem"**

What are your views on whether small volume manufacturers (between 1000 and 2499 registrations) and micro-volume manufacturers (fewer than 1000 annual registrations) should be subject to the 2030 requirements for cars and/or vans? What is your opinion on exemptions for kit cars from the 2030 requirements?

Autocar strongly believes that small, micro-volume and kit car manufacturers should be exempt from the 2030 requirements. Such firms are a key part of the wider British manufacturing industry, helping to drive technical innovation and employee skills development that benefit the wider economy.

Due to their low volume and the use case of most vehicles they produce, their overall impact on the UK's CO_2 emissions is negligible and subjecting them to cost-prohibitive electrification requirements could prove insurmountable for many. Most of these vehicles will stay on the roads for decades and do minimal mileage each year.

We do recognise that many of these firms are already looking at electrification solutions, so we would welcome incentives and support for them to pursue innovative and cost-effective emission-reduction technology that could ultimately benefit the wider industry. 🅰

PHEVs can cut CO_2 but their official EV range is somewhat a red herring

HAVE YOUR SAY

The current consultation runs until Tuesday 18 February. The form can be found at tinyurl.com/zun5bhjt and submissions must be emailed to zevmandate@dft.gov.uk or sent to ZEV regulations team, Department for Transport, 3rd Floor Great Minster House, 33 Horseferry Road, London, SW1P 4DR.

We would love to see your responses, so please email them to us at autocar@haymarket.com

NO MORE RENAULT PLUG-IN HYBRIDS AFTER RAFALE

Flagship is a one-off as "hybrid is easiest way to prepare people for EVs"

Renault is betting big on full-hybrid powertrains as a means of transitioning its cars and customers to pure-electric power and has no plans to expand its plug-in hybrid offering beyond its flagship Rafale.

Company CEO Fabrice Cambolive told Autocar that the decision to focus on full hybrids – a move that contrasts starkly with heavy recent investment in PHEVs by Audi, Toyota, Stellantis, BMW, Volvo and Volkswagen – is in acknowledgement of their usability and packaging benefits.

"Three or four years ago it was not obvious, choosing between mild hybrid, full hybrid, plug-in hybrid or pure-EV," he said. "There were a lot of different ways to manage your engine line-up. What we decided is to bet on full hybrid, because for me that is the easiest way to have low-consumption cars and to prepare our customers to go to EVs."

Renault's sole PHEV (and likely to be its last), the Rafale E-Tech 4x4, is unusual in combining a 1.2-litre three-cylinder petrol engine with three electric motors – one on each axle and a starter-generator in the gearbox. A 22kWh battery affords 66 miles of electric-only range.

Because Renault's PHEV powertrain is based on its lower-powered full-hybrid system, it operates with electric assistance even when the traction battery is empty – what Cambolive calls "a plug-in hybrid hybrid" arrangement.

He touted the resultant high-efficiency urban running as a primary advantage of this, as well as the maximum range of 600 miles when both fuel tank and battery are brimmed, plus the fact that "you benefit from much more torque and acceleration".

Hybrids give drivers an "EV feeling", says boss Cambolive

Yet he has no intention of adapting the concept to suit other models.

It's unusual for a mainstream manufacturer to invest in a bespoke powertrain for a single model, particularly one as complex as this, but Cambolive said the Rafale already being offered as a full hybrid made the PHEV's development more cost-effective.

He explained: "It's only the addition of plug-in hybrid technology that we had before with hybrid technology we have also elsewhere. It's an intelligent way to associate two technologies which were already available."

Until 2021, Renault offered PHEV versions of the Mégane and Captur, but Cambolive said it no longer makes sense to offer a PHEV powertrain in smaller cars.

"Look at the Scenic [EV]," he said. "It has more than [373 miles] of autonomy. Why should we propose a car of this size with a plug-in hybrid solution, which perhaps in terms of package would not be so interesting or unique as the Rafale can be in its segment?

"When you go to the lower segments, if you can't afford to charge the car, you have a full-hybrid solution and it's far enough. Otherwise, you shift to EV. The plug-in hybrid was the cherry on the cake but with advantages that are linked to the size of the car.

"You can put a big tank, you can put four engines, but you need space to do that in a car, basically, and with some cars up to 4.4 metres [long], I don't know if it's worth it."

Asked if Renault's push towards a full-hybrid line-up means it has launched its final pure-combustion car, Cambolive said "it depends on the market".

"We still have ICE cars in a lot of countries, of course, in Europe and especially in the UK. I think that in the short term we will really be focused on hybrid and pure-electric cars," he said.

That casts doubt on the next generation of Renault's UK best-seller, the Clio, continuing to offer pure-petrol power when it is launched in 2026.

Cambolive said that hybridising B-segment cars "is becoming more interesting each time" as battery prices go down, tax on pure-ICE cars rises and residual values of electrified cars gain ground on their pure-ICE alternatives: "You can see in the past two or three years that the differential is widening."

FELIX PAGE

> **"I doubt it's worth giving a small car four engines"**

NEXT RENAULT 5 WILL BE 'THE SAME CAR BUT DIFFERENT'

Renault will preserve the new 5's design for as long as possible but keep the EV competitive throughout its life via upgrades to its drivetrain and technology.

Crediting the supermini's early acclaim to its striking, 1970s-inspired design, technological capabilities and distinctive handling characteristics, CEO Fabrice Cambolive said Renault would bolster those attributes and not change anything fundamental.

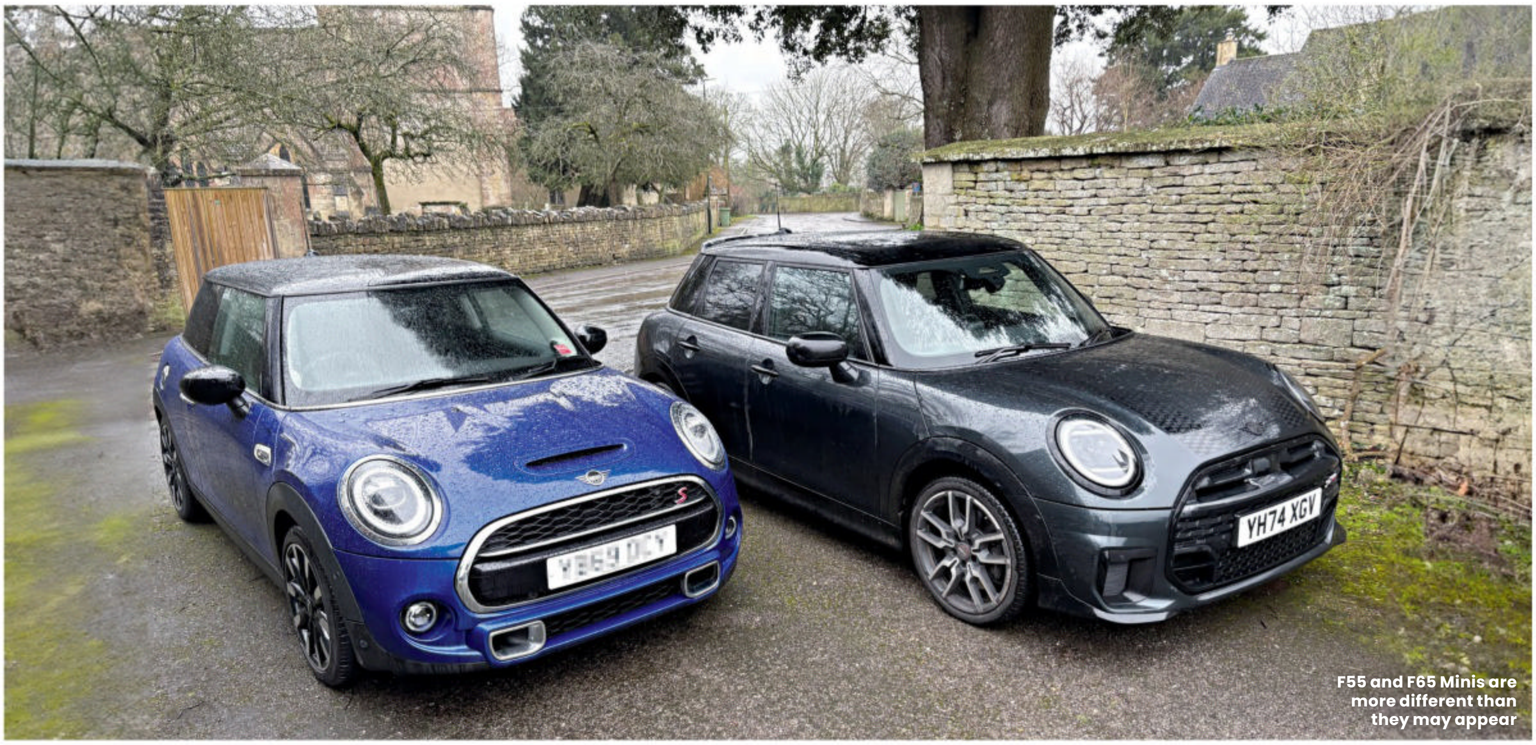
"We would like to stay with this design as long as we can," he said, adding that Renault will not look to change the "details" of the 5 but rather update "very, very precise elements" throughout the car's life.

The 5 should be up for a facelift in around 2028, at about the same time as Renault introduces a new generation of EVs with vastly improved efficiency, rapid charging and much cheaper batteries.

It is likely that the supermini will be able to take advantage of the promised technological developments – but before that, in 2026, Renault will swap its mainstream EV batteries from NMC to LFP, which it says will reduce costs by 20% while having no impact on range.

MY WEEK IN CARS

Steve Cropley



F55 and F65 Minis are more different than they may appear

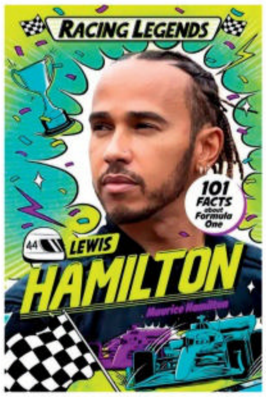
SATURDAY, SUNDAY

It's not often you get to drive a brand-new car while having direct access to its predecessor, but this happened to me over the weekend. I bagged Felix Page's recently arrived Mini Cooper S 5dr for a Cotswolds trip, where I also did some miles in our own 69-plate Cooper S 3dr.

It seems to me the new one has progressed in every important way: less road noise, sharper and lighter steering, more poke, slightly better damping, better instrumentation and (courtesy of its JCW options pack) much better seats.

Over the weekend, I became more and more familiar with the new Cooper and found myself either regretting that journeys had ended or finding longer routes home so they didn't. To me, 'destination disappointment' has always been the ultimate indicator that a car is intrinsically good.

MONDAY



Hamilton on Hamilton: a fun read for F1-mad kids

Ian Callum may no longer be the design boss of Jaguar, but he is still one of this country's finest automotive designers, as he proved in an evening presentation at the British Motor Museum at Gaydon.

Their biggest conference room was packed with 350 car lovers. Four cars from Callum's back catalogue flanked the stage – Ford Puma, Aston Martin DB7, Jaguar XK and Jaguar C-XF concept – and he talked us around these and through images of literally dozens more designs.

> “It has become a chronic, wallet-sapping problem”

The interviewer was TV bloke Paul Cowland, who made the evening zing as he always does.

It was brilliant, and just one of a dozen excellent evening presentations also offered at this time of year in places like Brooklands, Beaulieu and the Haynes museum. January and February may not be ideal for driving, but there's lots of fascinating listening to be done.

WEDNESDAY

Disaster! Driving home in Page's new Mini on a gloomy wet afternoon, I hit what looked like a puddle but turned out to be a water-filled crater. The wheel crashed into it and the tyre pressure monitor soon started signalling serious damage.

I stopped straight away: the offside front Pirelli had bubbled and there was a horrible abrasion in the sidewall. No spare, of course. I Googled the nearest tyre dealer and found Grip Tyres, two miles away in Bicester. They had no 215/40Z R18 Pirelli to sell me so I invested £70 (instead of £250) in something called a Lanvigator – a Chinese budget brand – that looked and worked okay, although I started noticing extra wheelspin on brisk take-offs.

A day or two later, we fitted a new Pirelli. On the way home, even though I was scanning the road as never before, I hit another crater, this time with the other front wheel. Same awful crash, same prickling scalp, same heart in mouth as I waited for the damage to be signalled on the tyre pressure monitor. Through luck, I got away with it this time, but the episode made clear what a chronic, wallet-sapping problem pothole damage has become.

It makes driving harder, too: as well as just driving and looking for the ever more prevalent cameras and speed-limit signs, you're now searching for holes that will shred your tyres.

FRIDAY

Once a month on Fridays, a group of us gather at Brooklands for a lunch event that its founder, Steve Clarke, has dubbed the Concrete Club. An interesting speaker leads the chat while we nosh.

This week's star turn was Maurice Hamilton, former Autocar and Observer Formula 1 editor, who talked about many aspects of the sport. (Can Lewis do it? He thinks so.) Turns out he recently started writing a series of kids' paperback books about F1's stars, called Racing Legends, widely available at £6.99 each. The popular view may be that kids don't read any more, but if Hamilton's sales are anything to go by, it's not true.

AND ANOTHER THING

One of the pleasures of recording a weekly podcast with Matt Prior is the regular presence of a ginger producer called Midge, Prior's convivial rescue cat. Here he is last week in an usually relaxed mode: he often specialises in walking on keyboards. He snored gently through our 40-minute chat – a reaction we're hoping won't extend to other listeners.

GET IN TOUCH
steve.cropley@haymarket.com

PRIOR CONVICTION

Matt Prior

The latest government consultation on how quickly the UK car market should migrate to fully electric vehicles concerns what will happen between 2030 and 2035. But it has made it 100% clear where the entire industry, even small- and micro-scale manufacturers, will stand after that.

All new cars, no matter who makes them, must be fully zero-emissions after 1 January 2035. No engines. No exemptions. Nobody, as was the case previously and which remains the case in the EU, is 'out of scope' of the regulations.

Are you a car maker that produces five newly registered cars a year by hand? From 2035, you will be in the same boat as Ford.

It's worth reiterating how clear this is. The latest consultation, launched on Christmas Eve and running to 18 February, asks questions and puts forward proposals that include whether small-scale car makers should be included in the 2030 changes.

They're the reason why Lister boss Lawrence Whittaker was on the news last week seeking urgent clarification, having stopped all of the firm's future development plans.

The government has acknowledged that "there is a precedent for treating small manufacturers differently" and stated: "Kit cars represent a very small overall segment of the market. It is proposed that applying the requirements to kit cars would therefore not be proportionate."

Beyond that, though, there's no doubt, no hidden meaning, no ambiguity, as paragraph 62 of the consultation reads: "It is clear that all manufacturers must decarbonise according to the ambitious timetable for all new cars and vans to be ZEV by 2035, including those made by low-volume manufacturers." Paragraph 64: "For all manufacturers of all sizes, new cars and vans must be 100% zero-emission by 2035."

The short of it is: if you want a combustion-engined Caterham, you have 10 years left.

Emissions regs pose a real challenge for car makers like Caterham

This is despite the acknowledgement that "smaller-volume manufacturers account for a very small proportion of overall UK vehicle sales and limited amounts of CO_2" and that "they play a vital role in supporting jobs, investment, skills and expertise within the UK automotive industry". It's hoped that in future they "will play an important role in the transition to ZEVs" (all from paragraph 61), whether they and their customers want to or not.

It doesn't matter that, as it stands, it requires considerably more CO_2 emissions to make a zero-emissions car than it does a pure-ICE one, nor that micro-volume cars are typically driven such small distances annually that it could take decades, if ever, for one to reach the point where a BEV would have been better for the planet.

This will especially be the case once non-fossil-based, renewable ICE fuels – which will be so essential for construction, aerospace and agriculture – come on-stream. Concessions for these are being considered within the EU.

> "Hand-make five cars a year? You'll be in the same boat as Ford"

It doesn't matter that Ariel's annual output wouldn't keep Toyota in business for nine minutes. It doesn't matter that these small companies win awards for exports. It doesn't matter that most UK race circuits don't have and may not get the electrical capacity to quickly charge EVs' batteries. It's as simple as this: if it has four wheels, to be sold new in 10 years, it must have no tailpipe.

Perhaps you think this is fine. These are agile companies employing clever people. Previously Ariel has said an electric future doesn't faze it, while Caterham has dabbled with a prototype Seven EV – although it couldn't get it to work or, more pertinently, find many interested customers.

And it may be that promised new battery technology of the sort that is dissuading some current ICE car owners from making the EV switch (the solid-state batteries promised by Nissan in 2028, Stellantis's lithium-sulphur batteries for 2030) will make an electric niche car better, lighter and more fun than it is today.

If that is the case (and this is true to an extent of the wider car industry), the regulations won't be necessary. We didn't mandate cassettes, CDs, minidiscs or MP3 players into existence because of a dislike of vinyl; new tech was just preferable, so we chose it and left the hobbyists alone.

The same path would easily suit niche car makers: if we want to buy it, they will want to make it, and those who don't will be so few that it will make no difference to the world.

In the meantime, I'm not a natural fan of whataboutery or 'they hate you' conspiracies, but I find myself being tested.

You can read about Autocar's response to the consultation on p14, along with information on how to read the consultation document and submit your own response.

GET IN TOUCH
matthew.prior@haymarket.com

Geoff Page Racing
SUZUKI
EU59 BFN
RX12 LWT
AE62 EHL
DAX

Kit cars may be exempted from ZEV rules but factory-built ones probably won't be

RACING LINES

Damien Smith

Another riveting Daytona 24 Hours ended in another victory for a Porsche 963

Tasty victories and record extensions were dished up in quick succession on the final Sunday in January in the two traditional early-season 'majors', the World Rally Championship's Monte Carlo Rally and IMSA Sportscar Championship's Daytona 24 Hours whetting appetites for the feast of motorsport on the menu for 2025.

TANDY'S GRAND SLAM

In Florida, Porsche snared its 20th overall victory in the Daytona 24 Hours as Felipe Nasr made the difference in the final hour, just as he did for the Penske-run works team this time last year. On this occasion, the Brazilian ex-Formula 1 racer shared the spoils with Belgian Laurens Vanthoor – who added a prized Daytona Rolex watch to the World Endurance Championship title that he claimed three months ago – and Brit Nick Tandy.

For 40-year-old Tandy, victory was particularly sweet, because it elevates him to a unique status as the only driver to have completed a sports car racing grand slam. He has overall wins to his name at all four of the world's major 24-hour races: at Le Mans (in 2015), the Nürburgring (2018), Spa-Francorchamps (2020) and now Daytona, and all of them in Porsches.

"At some point years ago, someone told me that nobody had ever managed to achieve overall victory in the four biggest 24-hour races," said an understandably emotional Tandy, who previously scored a GT-class win at Daytona (again in a Porsche) 11 years ago. "Since that day, this goal has been in the back of my mind."

Tandy has come an awful long way from where it all began for him, following his older brother Joe into racing Ministox and then Mini Se7ens. His tale is a true against-the-odds, grass-roots-to-the-pinnacle yarn, and winning big sports car races was always the ultimate ambition. Championships? Of course they mean a lot too. But sports car racers crave the 'majors' first.

> **"He's the only driver to have won all four major 24-hour races"**

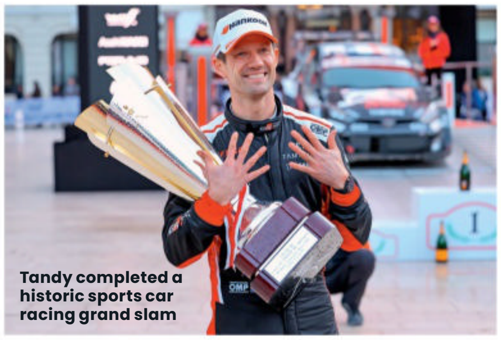
As Tandy cheerfully told me last year: "Winning Le Mans in 2015 changed my life, totally. I don't get introduced as Porsche driver Nick Tandy; I'm introduced as Le Mans winner Nick Tandy. It stays with you for life. Since I started racing at 11, I've wanted to win everything and keep moving on to the next major thing that's possible."

Well, Tandy has won the lot now. But it's a full decade since he won Le Mans. Come June, he will be hungry again.

NASR DOES IT AGAIN

The victory will also enhance Nasr's already sky-high reputation, both within Porsche and through all of sports car racing.

As usual, the result of the Daytona 24 Hours came down to the final hour, and just like last year Nasr had to dig deep to win. After the final safety car interlude, just 38 minutes were left on the clock. Running third, Nasr opportunistically slipped past Dries Vanthoor's BMW at the restart into turn one, then with 22 minutes left picked off the sister Porsche of Matt Campbell into the Le Mans chicane.



Tandy completed a historic sports car racing grand slam

But a Penske Porsche one-two was thwarted by Tom Blomqvist, who claimed second place for Acura Meyer Shank Racing in the final 10 minutes. Brit Blomqvist's Daytona record now reads: two consecutive wins, two consecutive second places. The hat-trick will still be waiting for him this time next year.

OGIER MAKES IT 10

Earlier that afternoon, Sébastien Ogier – aka the Monte Master – had extended his own record by scooping a remarkable 10th victory on the most famous rally of them all.

The 41-year-old Frenchman was once again the star performer on the Monte Carlo Rally but had to negotiate changeable and tricky-to-read conditions to secure his double-digit success.

His British team-mate Elfyn Evans should be pleased with a strong start to his season, finishing 18.5sec behind Ogier to record a Toyota one-two, with Adrien Fourmaux pulling off a podium third on his maiden rally for Hyundai.

The 2025 season marks another new chapter for the WRC, which has dropped the costly hybrid systems from its Rally1 cars. Hybrid power was expected to draw new manufacturers to join Toyota, Hyundai and Ford, but after three seasons it's still the same trio running exclusively in the top class. Without the systems, the cars are now lighter but have less power. Hankook has also replaced Pirelli as the sole tyre supplier, adding another welcome unknown to the mix.

The new rubber certainly gave Kalle Rovanperä something to think about as the double world champion made his full-time return to the WRC after his part-season in 2024. The Finn at least pipped Hyundai's Ott Tänak for fourth, but it was a low-key Monte for rallying's sensation. We can expect more from him in the snow of Sweden next week.

YOUR VIEWS

WRITE TO autocar@haymarket.com

Letter of the week

DON'T PLAY WITH MY DOLLY

My daughter had a charming and much-loved Citroën 2CV Dolly. Let's hope its reincarnation doesn't look like the pseudo-travesty your artist has concocted (News, 22 January). Round headlights, please; two-tone paintwork, please; light wheels, not black; and an opening to the sky in a roofline that doesn't try to mimic the worst single-curvature styling mistakes from Germany.

The 2CV is supposed to be French, so why not include a free egg basket and ploughed field with every one? My Skoda Superb wouldn't be a Skoda Superb without its umbrella: that's why I never take it out of the door!

We well remember putting our Dolly on the Motorail (Lost in the archive) and watching 'expert' British Rail drivers getting to grips with the gears. The Americans used a similar plastic knob on a stick to select attitude-control thrusters on early manned spacecraft. I often wonder where they got the idea from, but they claimed it was scientifically determined to be ideal for heavily gloved astronaut hands.

As for DS, I despair. Trying to sell the N°8 on the basis that its seats are aspirationally Bentley-esque (News) is about as stupid as the seats themselves. To my eyes, the rears look like a pair of semi-naked criminal heavies displaying their torso muscles, while the fronts are taller and more elegant mannequins wearing neck scarves.

As for the full-frontal view of the N°8, I suggest that they paint it pink and call it a Jaguar.

Peter Middleton, via email

PARKING MAD

I read with dismay that councils are yet again going to hammer motorists more for car parking charges in their towns and cities (News, 22 January).

Motorists are just cash cows to the councils. No wonder they are dismayed at remote working: they lose income from their extortionate parking and emissions-zone fees.

I particularly would want to call out the Dudley Council leader with his attitude of "no one will die from having to pay £1.50 to park". This sums up the attitude of councils towards motorists. Well, £1.50 this year, £5 next year. No, nobody will die, but your town centres will die – are dying, in fact – from motorists voting with their feet.

Gareth Rosser
Via email

WHAT IS HE THINKING?

Can someone explain Tesla's future strategy to me?

Watching Donald Trump's inauguration speech, in which he trashed the Paris Agreement on climate change, renounced EV incentives, cancelled spending on charging infrastructure, confirmed import tariffs on Chinese EVs and declared a new golden era of oil and gas exploration, I was confused to see Elon Musk dancing around like an overexcited child. How will any of this benefit Tesla?

You recently reported a 'Tesla Model 2' as being likely to arrive this year. I thought Musk had recently denounced moving into the 'affordable' EV market as pointless. Has he changed his mind again?

Perhaps he is planning to leave Tesla and concentrate on colonising Mars along with Trump. To paraphrase Buzz Lightyear: "To insanity and beyond!"

Nigel Macleod
Via email

Musk has publicly given mixed messages about the 'Model 2' over the past year or so, but Tesla's recently released 2024 financial year update stated: "Plans for new vehicles, including more affordable models, remain on track for start of production in the first half of 2025. These will utilise aspects of the next-generation platform as well as aspects of our current platforms" – KC

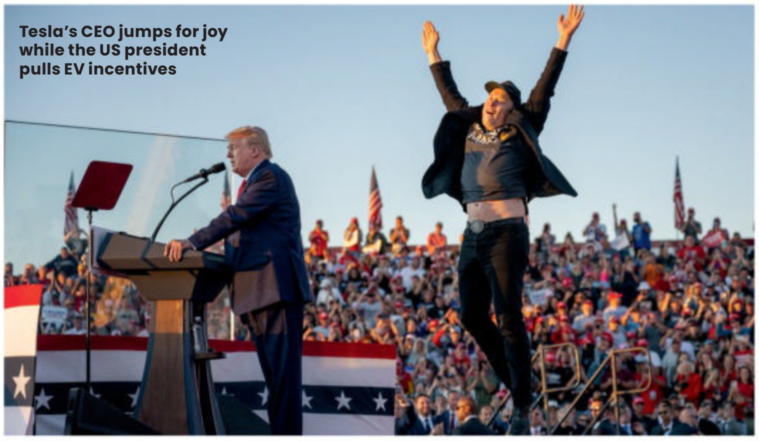
HOW DS CAN WIN

Your article about DS's wish to move upmarket (News, 22 January) and the related interior photos of the DS N°8 reminded me of when, maybe 30 years ago, the buzz phrase in automotive design was 'surprise and delight'. This ethos led to some great interiors and perhaps peak Audi. The proliferation of touchscreens and poorly developed ADAS has led us to what we might term 'surprise and frustrate'. But that does mean there's an enormous opportunity for DS and others (Jaguar, for example) to deliver a new/old type of luxury.

The photo missing from the DS article was of the dashboard. If DS focuses on providing physical controls made from beautiful materials, I think they could quickly differentiate themselves and draw a significant pool of buyers. I would certainly be at the front of the line.

Barry Wakelin
Via email

It's all touchscreen, I'm afraid – KC



Tesla's CEO jumps for joy while the US president pulls EV incentives

Offer physical controls instead and DS could be in business, says Barry

High End Pie

As Hyundai's ad shows, voice control struggles with poor pronunciation

GETTY IMAGES

STAY IN YOUR LANE

Few if any car makers with origins in lower sectors have ever managed to break into and compete with businesses that occupy the upper echelons. The consumers who shop up there simply won't have it. And if Stellantis can't get its portfolio crown jewel – Maserati – to compete with that royalty, what hope a six-figure DS?

'Mister MR44'
Via autocar.co.uk

COMPUTER SAYS WHAT?

I think Matt Prior is missing the point about Hyundai's advertising (Prior Conviction, 15 January). It isn't about how the general public pronounces the name; it's about how Hyundai drivers pronounce it. In a world where we're used to saying "Alexa, play Virgin Radio" or "Hey Google, navigate to Haymarket headquarters", the pronunciation of the 'wake word' is critical.

Mercedes-Benz has software in its cars that uses “Hey, Mercedes” as the wake word. For Hyundai to successfully implement something similar, it needs British drivers to pronounce ‘Hyundai’ in a way that the software can recognise.

Growing up in 1970s Northern Ireland, I regularly heard people say they had a ‘Pew-jote’, a ‘Ren-olt’ or an ‘Oh-dee’, but that has pretty much died out, and even those of us from County Down now use something close to the correct French or German pronunciations for Peugeot, Renault and Audi – although the French pronunciation of Citroën is still beyond most English speakers.

If we can pronounce ‘Peugeot’ like the French, why can’t we pronounce ‘Hyundai’ like the Koreans?

Neil
Via autocar.co.uk

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

I thought Hyundai’s ad was tongue-in-cheek, the company trying to have fun, nothing to be taken too seriously. I still say ‘Hi-un-die’ and will continue to do so. I say ‘Porsh’ instead of ‘Porsher’ even though I know what is correct. I don’t really care and I don’t think the companies do either. Hyundai is just having a bit of fun, naff as it may be. So don’t take it too seriously.

Si
Via autocar.co.uk

KERNOW, NOW

As a Cornishman, I was sorry to hear that Steve Cropley found that driving manners from the “locals” were less than pleasant during his recent trip to Cornwall (My Week In Cars, 22 January).

I do think that this slur on Cornish drivers is rather unfair and also surprising.

I wonder if there’s a clue in Steve’s comment that the locals could “mystically detect” that he was not one of them. Apart from the jamming of a creaking road network during the summer, us locals can often detect tourists from their difficulties in judging the size of their cars when in narrow lanes, their inability to reverse for more than a few inches and their meandering pace while they admire the scenery, oblivious of the fact that we have lives to get on with.

I trust that Steve was not guilty of any of these crimes?

John Opie
Redruth, Cornwall

Weekly winner

Letter of the week wins this ValetPro exterior protection and maintenance kit worth £48

GREAT REASONS TO BUY

Next week’s issue

ON SALE 12 FEBRUARY

FEATURE

DREAM USED CARS FOR UNDER £30K

We pick extraordinary used cars that will get the adrenaline coursing through the veins of any enthusiast – for the price of a boring new car

INSIGHT

HOW TO DESIGN A HYDROGEN SUPERCAR

We scrutinise the vision of tomorrow’s designers from Coventry Uni

ROAD TEST

POLESTAR 3: ‘DESIGNED FOR THE THRILL OF DRIVING’

That’s what its maker claims. Our road testers will be the judge of that

EVERY WEEK

LIVING WITH A…

MAZDA MX-5

Popular affordable sports car arrives at Autocar HQ. Is it still a great buy after a decade on sale?

USED GUIDE

VOLKSWAGEN GOLF GTI

There’s probably no better hot hatch for daily life than a Mk7 GTI. Here’s how to get a good one

CONTENTS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

AUTOCAR

The original car magazine, published since 1895 ‘in the interests of the mechanically propelled road carriage’

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Circulation enquiries: Frontline Ltd, 1st Floor, Stuart House, St John’s Street, Peterborough, PE1 5DD (01733 555161). Printed by William Gibbons, Wolverhampton. Registered as a newspaper with the Royal Mail. Member of the ABC. ISSN 1355-8293.

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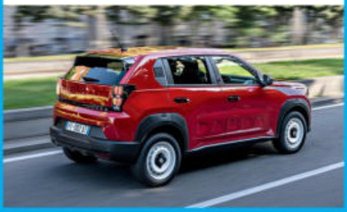
FIRST DRIVES

THIS WEEK'S HIGHLIGHTS



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HOW WE TEST CARS

Autocar delivers several kinds of reviews on new cars, with different levels of technical and functional scrutiny. As the name suggests, our First Drives section typically addresses cars that we're driving for the first time - either in final production form or as late prototypes. Time in the car can be limited here, technical and equipment specification might not be finalised and some systems software may not be to production specification. For those reasons, First Drive reports don't have star ratings.

Once we have driven a car for a second time in the UK, in right-hand-drive form and typically at greater length, we will rate it, either as part of a shorter UK test report or as the subject of a full, instrumented Road Test.

In the latter case, we take empirical performance and refinement benchmarks from it at Horiba MIRA proving ground, as well as subjective limit handling impressions, plus key measurements of practicality, efficiency and kerb weight.

All UK tests and Road Tests receive proper verdicts with star ratings informed by everything we have learned and the combined impressions and experience of several testers.

WATCH THE VIDEO

TESTED 22.1.25, VALENCIA, SPAIN **ON SALE** MARCH

PORSCHE 911 GT3

GT division lavishes detail changes on the track-focused 911, some learned from the fabulous S/T

This facelift – or, in geek speak, the 992.2 iteration – of the 911 GT3 may not look so different from the car it replaces but, as is sometimes the case with Porsche's GT division, detail changes are everything. I shall try to cover them all within my word limit.

The GT3, as you may know, is the more track-focused version of the 911 – not as extreme as the GT3 RS, so still road-pliant. The GT3 Touring – no wings, looks a bit more classy, for road enthusiasts – is being launched at the same time as the one with wings. Aerodynamic addenda aside, mechanically the two are the same. Think of them as trim levels: wing or no wing. And this time the GT3 Touring can be had with rear seats.

Chief among the changes that drivers are likely to feel are new bump stops in the suspension – smaller, allowing an extra 25mm of linear travel before the suspension runs into them. More road compliance or more absorbance if you run over trackside kerbs is the idea.

The front suspension has also had a small rejig to give it better anti-dive properties.

The electric power steering software has been tweaked. It was considered a bit too light and nervy off the straight-ahead previously, so the intention is to make it feel more linear, precise ▸

◂ and stable. More like the 911 S/T, although that didn't have active rear steering, which the GT3 retains.

To meet the latest emissions regulations, the 4.0-litre naturally aspirated flat six has been given another two catalytic converters, so now there are four. That's "nothing we like very much", says Jörg Jünger, the GT3's project manager, because it increases exhaust back pressure in a bad way, by 15-17%, so there's new valve timing and revised throttle bodies to compensate.

The result is that power is the same as previously – 503bhp at 8500rpm – and the engine can still rev to 9000rpm, but torque is down by 15lb ft, at 332lb ft.

So that the GT3 isn't slower to accelerate, then, the final drive ratio has been shortened by 8% on both the six-speed manual and optional seven-speed dual-clutch automatic (PDK) gearboxes.

There are also changes that you won't immediately feel but are of benefit: there are now air ducts around the front suspension to aid brake cooling and on the rear suspension to aid driveshaft cooling.

Weight would have been up by 20kg, partly because of the extra cats and partly because the 992 911 has gained weight since its launch by receiving things like beefier door bars, so lighter carpets and battery have been fitted. And you can spec lightweight packages.

Calmer steering is perhaps the most notable improvement

"You're comfortable approaching your limits within minutes"

On the GT3 Touring, the Lightweight Package includes carbonfibre fabrication for the roof, rear underfloor shear panel and rear anti-roll bar and couplings, lightweight carbonfibre interior options, including new seats, and magnesium wheels. That keeps the kerb weight at 1420kg – basically the same as the old GT3's (1418kg).

On the regular GT3, that pack is called the Weissach Package, but it doesn't include magnesium wheels as standard, because if you do loads of track work, you might want the durability of the standard alloy wheels instead.

People have criticised the latest 992.2-generation 911 for its purely digital dials, but here at least the rev counter has been made bigger.

There's still a twisting key, rather than the start button that's appearing on other 911s, while the ADAS can be more easily switched out, because "no GT3 customer will buy it because of the driving assist systems", says Jünger.

Winged or not, the GT3 costs from £157,300 in the UK. Lightweight options begin at around £15,000 on the regular car or £20,000 including a roll-cage; nearer £30,000 on the Touring, including the fancy wheels. Carbon-ceramic brakes (not in the lightweight packs) are nearly £10,000. There are only two colours available for nothing: black and white. So buyers should expect to pay a fair bit more than the base price. But given that Porsche will make fewer cars than there are would-be customers, it is what it is.

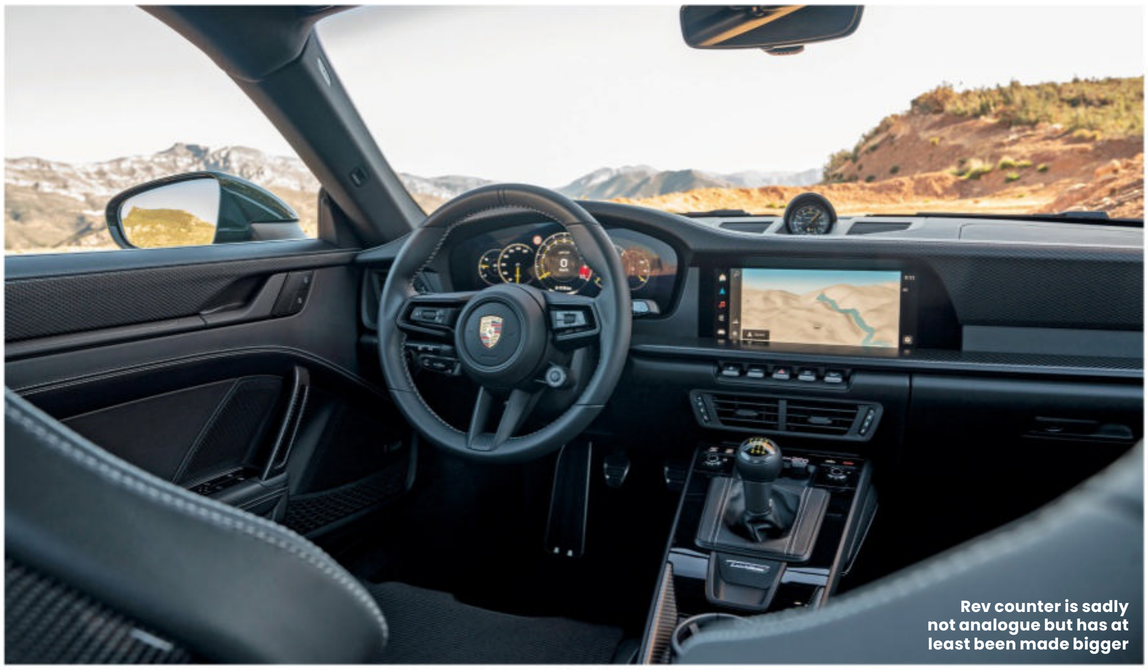
My drive was neatly divided into a track session in a regular GT3 with a PDK, followed by a road drive of a Touring with a manual. Both were fitted with lightweight packages, which I suspect will be such a desirable option second-hand that most buyers will spec them.

I will start with the track drive. It's easy to settle into the GT3. The steering wheel is round, with a drive mode selecting knob on it, which can firm the adaptive dampers (PASM in Porsche speak). You can spec new carbonfibre seats, with removable head bolsters to give more helmet room – proper

TESTER'S NOTE

Most 911s are moving to a start button, but Porsche's GT division thinks the natural thing to do if you've stalled (particularly on a circuit) is twist a key-like switch, rather than faffing about wondering if the ignition is on or off, so that's what the GT3 retains. Bravo. **MP**

PORSCHE
S GO 5007



Rev counter is sadly not analogue but has at least been made bigger

Wheels are 20in at front and 21in at rear

Front air intake is now larger and matrix LED headlights have been redesigned

WEIGHT GAINS AND LOSSES

Porsche had to get quite creative to keep the weight increase to just 2kg, but later 992 GT3s would have been heavier than the early quoted weight anyway, because of legislative and in-cycle changes. The doors were reinforced, ADAS hardware was added and even the brake discs were made thicker – alterations that weren't signposted on the way through.

The lightest 992.1 GT3 was 1418kg. The 992.2 GT3 was looking at being 1439kg, and the new catalysts accounted for only 1.4kg of the increase.

Some manufacturers would have left it at that. Porsche not so much. "It was a huge challenge to achieve this," says GT3 project manager Jörg Jünger about reducing it to the previous model's starting point.

The new aluminium wheels are 1.7kg lighter than before and the magnesium options will save 9.1kg. Making the rear shear panel, anti-roll bar and its couplings from carbonfibre saved 4.1kg. The carbonfibre roof saves 1kg, the new battery 1kg and the thinner carpet 2kg.

racy jobs yet which fold to allow access to the rear seats. They're £5000 but excellent.

I couldn't tell you whether the carpet is thinner or that the gears are lower on circuit, perhaps even with a straight back-to-back test between old and new.

Suffice to say the GT3 is still a brilliant track car. As ever, the engine still zings with the best of them, the gearshifts are instant and the brake pedal feel is firm.

Added to it are things I might be kidding myself I notice even though I last drove a GT3 in August 2023. I do think the steering feels calmer. Porsche had a GT3 at the S/T launch for a quick comparison, and the GT3's steering felt lighter, flightier from the straight-ahead. Partly down, surely, to the active rear-steer. Still good, just not as good as the S/T's. But whatever, they've calmed that initial response for a bit more stability, a bit more natural feel as you begin to turn. Although with that rear-steer, there's no absence of agility.

In steady state, it will work up to a bit of understeer. You can drive up to it, brake on entry to manage it or, in the right gear with plenty of revs applied, work the rear tyres to balance it.

The sensational thing about almost any 911, but particularly the GT3, is that you feel comfortable approaching your limits within minutes of getting into the car, such is its communicativeness and consistency. Then, they say, you can just turn off the circuit and, after making sure you haven't mullered the tyres and brakes (which in our experience Porsches are very kind on), head onto the road.

There I found the GT3's manual gearbox, whose lever has been given the S/T's shorter shift. If I told you I had noticed the extra absorbance while turning over track kerbs, I might have been pretending, although it did feel willingly compliant. But on the road, this definitely does feel like a car that has retained all of its connectedness and feel but never runs out of ability on bad surfaces. It's a fearsomely good road car.

If there's a flipside to the additional compliance, it's that the engine now spins at 3000rpm-plus at 70mph, and presumably thinner carpets assist sound absorbance less than they did, so the GT3 is a little noisy at a cruise. But we're talking about a car with a possibly unique blend of road and track ability here. It's so satisfying as both a road and a circuit car.

You could buy it for one of those jobs only and love it. For it to do both so well is remarkable. No one else quite makes a car like this at the moment – at least not one that doesn't insist you get wet and cold when it rains. It's the best all-rounder, improved by details.

MATT PRIOR

Subtly altered rear has new downforce-boosting elements

TECH SPEC

PORSCHE 911 GT3

Detail changes reinforce the GT3's position as the car that offers the best combination of road and track fun

Price £157,300
Engine 6 cyls horizontally opposed, 3996cc, petrol
Power 503bhp at 8500rpm
Torque 332lb ft at 6250rpm
Gearbox 6-spd manual, RWD
Kerb weight 1420kg
0-62mph 3.9sec
Top speed 194mph
Economy 20.6mpg
CO_2, tax band 310g/km, 37%
Rivals Alpine A110 R, Aston Martin Vantage, Maserati MC20 GT2

TESTED 28.1.25, TURIN, ITALY **DELIVERIES** APRIL

FIAT GRANDE PANDA

Supermini-sized 'utility' EV offers retro cheeriness at a very low price

Small Fiats tend to live long lives. The 500 was finally taken off sale in 2024 after 17 years, a new set of legislative hurdles proving insurmountable. The Panda is already 13 years old and has another five years to go before a replacement comes. And the Punto was also 13 when it was retired in 2018. As it disappeared without anyone really noticing, that no replacement was forthcoming slipped under the radar too.

Now a replacement of sorts has arrived: the Grande Panda. Given that the Panda was taken off sale in the UK last year (it survives in most other markets in Europe), you would be forgiven for thinking the Grande Panda replaces that, but no, it's a new model, filling the space in the Fiat range for a 4m-long (so supermini-sized) car that has existed since the Punto's demise.

Perhaps surprisingly, Fiat is the biggest of the 13 Stellantis brands globally, which is why it chose to create a 'utility vehicle' rather than a supermini (think a slightly raised hatchback; a Dacia Sandero Stepway to a standard Sandero): because it will appeal to and can be built in the global markets in which the brand has a large presence (Brazil, Turkey and Algeria, for example).

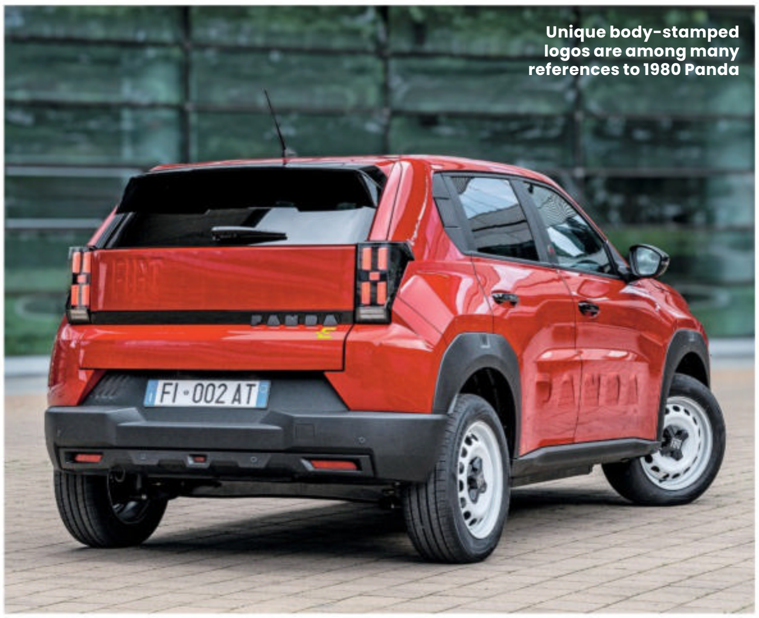
But the Grande Panda isn't one of those 'global cars' that's built to appeal to everyone but ends up appealing to nobody, with all the joy sucked out of it. Instead, it's a car packed full of cheerfulness and clever touches that has a habit of making you smile outside and in.

Entry-level Red gets 16in white steel wheels and ride-enhancing tyres

The starting point for the Grande Panda was Stellantis's new Smart Car platform, which can house internal combustion and electric drivetrains and is also used for the new Citroën C3 and C3 Aircross (see p28). It mimics Dacia in being built to a cost, so the price at which Fiat can offer the car is headline-grabbing, particularly in EV form.

The 99bhp 1.2-litre mild-hybrid petrol version costs £18,975, while the 111bhp EV (with 199 miles of range) costs £20,975. That undercuts the ë-C3 by around £1000, and while the Citroën looks and feels a bit plain, verging on austere in places, the only thing plain about the Grande Panda is its plain good value.

“The only thing plain about this car is its plain good value”



Unique body-stamped logos are among many references to 1980 Panda

The entry-level model with the electric drivetrain is named Red as part of a charity partnership. Other paint colours are on offer, but when you look at our test car, with the contrast between its white 16in steel wheels and red body, why would you go for anything else?

You can go Easter egg hunting for hidden details before you even get to turn the key – something that itself feels a novelty in an EV.

On the outside, the silhouette is the first nod to the original Panda. The Fiat badge is stamped into the bodywork on the rear hatch, while the Panda name adorns the sides in another nod to that 1980 model. The Panda badge’s 3D treatment at the rear is far from conventional, too, while the pixel lights at the front are another retro touch.

For the first time on a car, there is a retractable charging cable in the front grille. Why has no car maker thought of this before? Great idea. It can deliver energy at a 7kW rate and there’s good reach from a 4.5m-long cable. A more conventional port features at the rear, which can accept up to 100kW.

Inside, there’s more cheeriness. The Panda name is embossed into the seats. The Fiat logo is stamped into the door cards, which are in part made from recycled cartons. The oval dashboard is inspired by the test track on the roof of Fiat’s famous old Lingotto facility in Turin, and there’s a little original Panda image tucked in there too.

All these touches lift something that could otherwise be so plain and conventional. To do without them could have made the car yet cheaper still, so credit to Fiat for striking such a good balance.

The way the Grande Panda drives is probably the least notable part of the package, but it doesn’t detract from its appeal. It’s plenty capable enough for the job it needs to do, feeling rugged and robust.

It differs mechanically from the C3 in not going all in on comfort with the hydraulic bump stops for the suspension in lieu of a more conventional set-up. The dynamic character of the pair still diverges more than you would think, the Citroën being pound for pound a more involving car to drive.

The Grande Panda’s handling is predictable rather than involving, likewise the steering. It does ride really rather well, though, thanks in part to the chunky tyre sidewalls. It can really tear down Turin streets that have seen some action, none of which has come from the council since the day the asphalt was laid.

Performance is more than adequate at step-off and the Grande Panda then doesn’t feel dwarfed by the traffic at motorway speeds, which isn’t a given among its small EV peers.

It feels roomier than most in the class too, even in the back, and still has a good-sized boot.

The Grande Panda is simple and intuitive to drive for the most part, and the same goes for how you operate it. It’s not overbearing to use or over-equipped with technology. I didn’t look for anything in the base-spec car that I felt should have been there. Perhaps the heated seats and rear-view camera of the La Prima would be welcome, but a £3000 uplift feels a bit steep.

The speed limit warning system is the most irritating thing, because of how often it’s activated falsely. It beeps like it’s monitoring a slightly abnormal resting heart rate.

That aside, the Grande Panda gets a largely clean bill of health. It’s a very wholesome and feelgood car for the most part. It’s not just another identikit platform twin or any other small EV.

Small Fiats live lengthy lives, and the Grande Panda is here for a good time as well as a long time.

MARK TISSHAW

TESTER’S NOTE

Opt for La Prima spec and you get a trim for the dashboard that’s in part made of bamboo fibres. Very panda-friendly. **MT**

TECH SPEC

FIAT GRANDE PANDA ELECTRIC RED

Not the most fun car to drive but nonetheless a remarkably fun car

Price £20,975
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 111bhp
Torque 90lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, FWD
Kerb weight 1536kg
0-62mph 11.0sec
Top speed 82mph
Battery 44.0/43.8kWh (total/usable)
Range, economy 199 miles, 3.6mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 2%
Rivals Citroën ë-C3, Renault 5, Vauxhall Corsa Electric

TESTER'S NOTE Although using makeshift seats, third-row passengers get a USB-C socket and cupholders. **WR**

TESTED 20.1.25, BARCELONA, SPAIN **DELIVERIES** SPRING

CITROEN C3 AIRCROSS

Cheap crossover gets new look, new mechanicals, seven-seat option…

The fourth-generation C3 was reinvented with a major focus on affordability. And it is now followed by its bigger brother, the C3 Aircross, which follows a similar formula with a dollop of extra practicality.

The second generation of the compact SUV starts from just over £20,000. Only the Dacia Duster, at £18,000 in bare-bones form, undercuts it. However, most buyers are likely to opt for the more luxurious Max trim, tested here.

The Aircross's low price, as with the smaller C3, is thanks partly to Stellantis's new cost-saving architecture, called Smart Car. The new model makes the switch from the PFA1 platform, which dates back to the Peugeot 206.

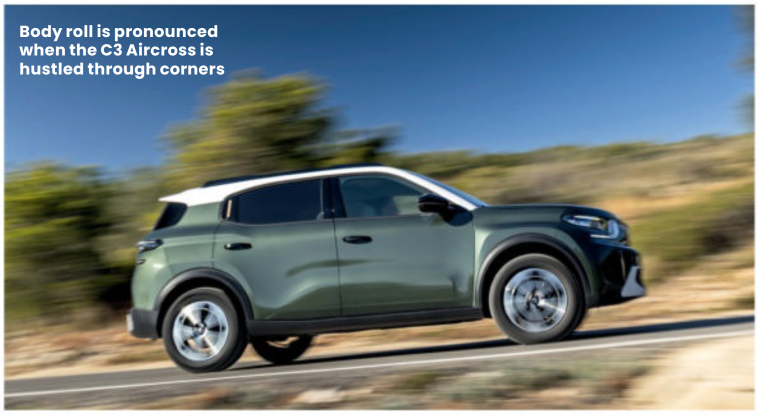
The Smart Car platform allows for the fitment of both petrol and electric powertrains (the electric ë-C3 Aircross is covered separately on the opposite page), and the C3 Aircross takes full advantage of this. Petrol buyers can choose from two set-ups, both with Stellantis's ubiquitous turbocharged 1.2-litre Puretech three-cylinder engine.

The entry-level model has 99bhp and a six-speed manual gearbox, or you can upgrade to a 134bhp hybrid system with an electric motor integrated into the six-speed dual-clutch automatic gearbox.

It offers a very simplified driving experience with just one drive mode and a fixed level of regenerative braking. It's able to drive on electric power for short distances and at lowish speeds.

When more power is called for, the transition from electric to combustion drive is noticeable but not overly so. Performance is adequate for an entry-level crossover, but the accelerator response is rather dull and the long gearing makes it feel somewhat sluggish. The kickdown could also be more responsive.

Then again, buyers looking at the C3 Aircross will most likely be swayed by how it looks rather than how it drives, says Citroën. The new-generation car is a big departure from the model it replaces, especially visually. Design boss Pierre Leclercq said the second-generation car is – along with the C3 – a clean-sheet design that brings a different attitude to the segment. Citroën is expecting plenty of conquest sales.



Body roll is pronounced when the C3 Aircross is hustled through corners

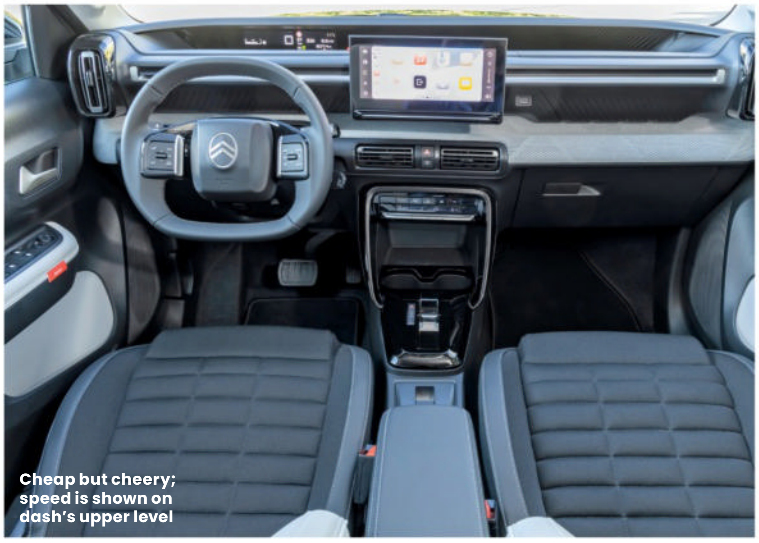
It's the same story inside, with a funky split dashboard that's centred on a 10.25in touchscreen. Although it's supposedly new, the technology feels rather last-generation and having to adjust the media volume via the touchscreen is impractical.

It's odd that a volume knob has been left out because, elsewhere, there are physical switches and buttons, including for the heating and ventilation and to turn off the speed limit warning (which is far from infallible).

Instead of a traditional driver's display, the information is projected onto a bar just underneath the base of the windscreen. It's a neat solution that's reminiscent of the old C4 Picasso, and it works better than the i-Cockpit in most Peugeots because the display is positioned high enough that you can easily see it over the small, square steering wheel.

Naturally, given the C3 Aircross's value positioning, there is plenty of cheap plastic to be found, but Citroën has done a good job of lifting the ambience. There are some plush materials such as the sofa-like fabric on the dashboard, there's ambient lighting and there are labels dotted around with inspirational slogans such as

“It uses hydraulic bump stops for a soft ride to good effect”



Cheap but cheery; speed is shown on dash’s upper level

‘be cool’ and ‘have fun’. The latter are a bit corny, but it adds a touch of personality to the cabin.

Like the smaller C3, the Citroën’s Advanced Comfort seats are well bolstered and comfortable on longer journeys, but even on the top trim the passenger seat doesn’t adjust for height.

The brand has embraced ride comfort in recent years, and that applies to the Aircross as well. It uses Citroën’s hydraulic bump stops for a soft ride to good effect, although Britain’s pockmarked roads might present more of a challenge.

The soft suspension translates to generous body roll, and while there’s decent weight to the steering around town, I found it had lacked some precision at speed.

The C3 Aircross has one more ace up its sleeve: it can be had with seven seats. At just 4.39m in length, it is only slightly longer than the shortest seven-seater on the market, the closely related Vauxhall Frontera.

Opting for the seven-seater version (a £765 option on Max trim) reduces the boot space from 460 litres to 330 litres (still 20 litres more than in the C3 supermini) with the third row down, and the third row is obviously very tight, but it is quite a rare feature. Having said that, the Dacia Jogger is more commodious and cheaper still.

The new C3 Aircross is a comfortable, spacious, practical and easy-to-use family hauler, with the option to add a third row. If you’re after a budget-priced crossover that looks funky while also being well equipped, it’s one to try.

WILL RIMELL

TECH SPEC

CITROEN C3 AIRCROSS HYBRID 136PS MAX

Comfortable, spacious and well equipped. At this price, this crossover could turn out to be the bargain of the year

Price £26,625
Engine 3 cyls, 1199cc, turbocharged, petrol, plus electric motor and ISG
Power 134bhp
Torque 170lb ft
Gearbox 6-spd dual-clutch automatic, FWD
Kerb weight 1389kg
0-62mph 10.1sec
Top speed 120mph
Economy na
CO_2, tax band 107g/km, 26%
Rivals Dacia Jogger, Vauxhall Frontera

TESTED 20.1.25, BARCELONA, SPAIN **DELIVERIES** SPRING

CITROEN E-C3 AIRCROSS

...and 188-mile electric sibling

EV inspires more confidence than its hybrid sibling

THE SECOND-GENERATION C3 Aircross is also offered with an electric powertrain. Badged ë-C3 Aircross, this is the same car as its combustion sibling, sharing the Smart Car platform and offered with identical equipment levels. No third row is offered, however.

Just one electric set-up is currently available: a 111bhp motor on the front wheels that draws power from a 44kWh lithium-iron-phosphate battery. It is claimed to allow 188 miles of driving between charges, down 15 miles on the ë-C3 with which it shares the system. A larger battery will become available later this year, boosting range to more than 250 miles, claims Citroën. Either version can be charged at up to 100kW on DC power.

What’s more, this is a cheap EV, opening at £22,990 – just £2500 more than the equivalent C3 Aircross and undercutting the mechanically identical Vauxhall Frontera. It is also cheaper than the forthcoming Ford Puma Gen-E and the smaller MG 4 EV, by around £7000 and £4000 respectively, albeit offering a shorter range.

Our £24,990 test car was in the same Max trim as the C3 Aircross we tested (left), so the interior is identical and comes equipped with the same Advanced Comfort seats.

Around town, the ë-C3 Aircross has the same wafty feel and light handling. Since the C3 Aircross is not meant to be sporty anyway, the extra weight is no big deal. If anything, the electric version feels slightly more planted.

The regen settings are set to a medium strength, allowing for most of the non-stopping braking to be done without needing to touch the brake pedal. Sadly, there is only one drive mode so you can’t adjust the regen level, and one-pedal driving is not offered. Another criticism is that the electric drivetrain’s power delivery is a bit laggy, in contrast to the more immediate response you get with other EVs, such as Stellantis stablemate the Vauxhall Corsa Electric.

For those after a town runaround with good equipment levels, comfort and a rather tasty starting price, the ë-C3 Aircross is hard to match. If more range is needed, however, you can either wait for the bigger battery to land later this year or look at pricier rivals.

WILL RIMELL

TECH SPEC

CITROEN E-C3 AIRCROSS MAX

What it lacks on the road it more than makes up for in other areas, and at a very tempting price

Price £24,990
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 111bhp
Torque 125lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, FWD
Kerb weight 1504kg
0-62mph 12.9sec
Top speed 89mph
Battery 44.0kWh (total)
Range, economy 188 miles, na
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 2%
Rivals Fiat Grande Panda Electric, Ford Puma Gen-E, Vauxhall Frontera Electric

TESTED 22.1.25, MIDDLESEX **DELIVERIES** NOW

JAECOO 7

Omoda's tougher-looking sibling brand starts with Tucson-rivalling SUV

The influx of Chinese cars arriving in the UK shows no signs of abating. This week's is the Jaecoo 7. Created by Chery, one of China's largest car makers, Jaecoo is the sister brand of Omoda, which launched its 5 SUV here towards the end of last year.

While Omoda is pitched at fashion-focused buyers, Jaecoo (the name is a blend of 'jäger', German for 'hunter', and 'cool') is aiming to undercut rivals in the premium SUV space with the off-road-focused, Range Rover Velar-inspired 7.

At 4500mm long, it's a bit shorter than the Kia Sportage, Hyundai Tucson or Volkswagen Tiguan and 100mm longer than the 5, with which it shares its platform.

Buyers can choose either a 1.6-litre four-cylinder turbo petrol engine with an automatic gearbox or a 1.5-litre-engined plug-in hybrid powertrain. The latter is set to be the more popular choice in the UK.

Affordability is high on the agenda for both versions of the 7. The petrol costs from £29,495, undercutting the equivalent Tucson, while the PHEV trumps its Sportage and Tiguan contemporaries at a hair over £35,000.

Using Chery's Super Hybrid System, the PHEV combines a turbo petrol four with a single electric motor for combined outputs of 201bhp and 228lb ft. Energy is drawn from a CATL-made 18.3kWh battery pack for an electric-only range of 57 miles. With it fully charged and the 60-litre fuel tank brimmed, Jaecoo claims an overall range of 745 miles.

It might look like a Velar but it's nowhere near as refined

The PHEV can be driven in pure-EV mode up to motorway speeds or with the engine and motor working in unison, and in either setting it feels brisk and is quiet.

The car tips the scales at just under 1800kg, and you do feel its bulk around corners, with plenty of body roll – especially if you're being anything less than cautious.

A lack of weight build-up in the steering means it feels pretty vague and numb when you're trying to place it on the road, too.

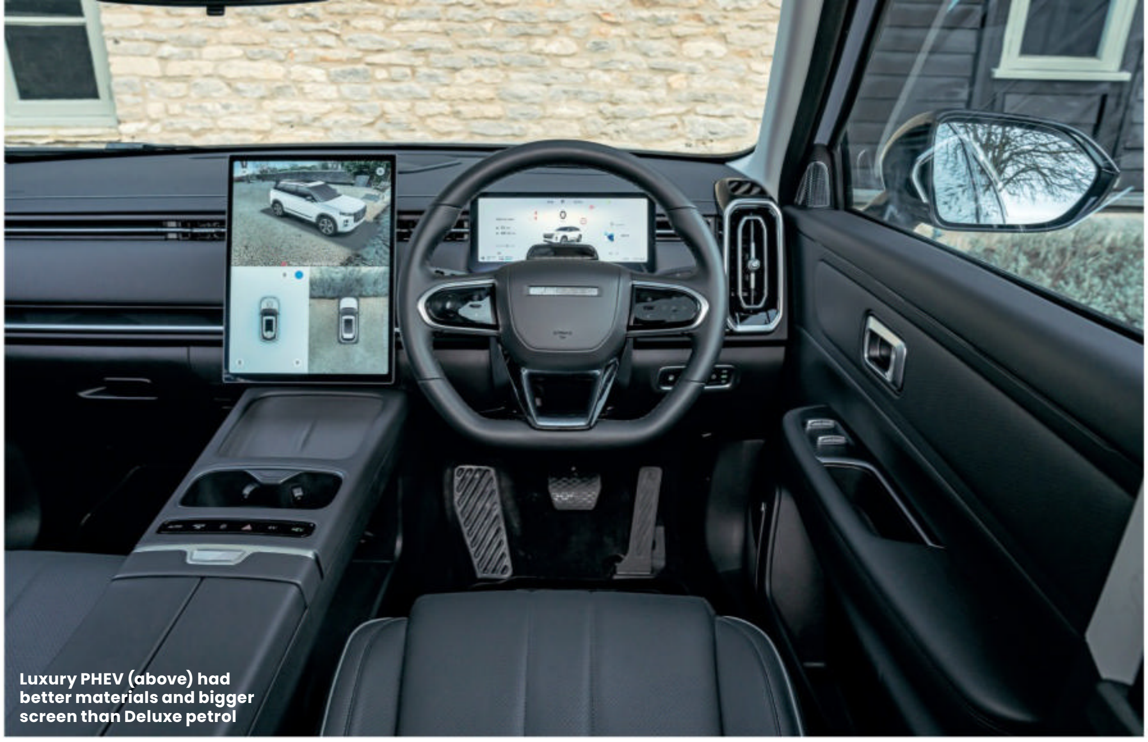
And if you accelerate hard from a junction, the tyres can easily break traction, be it in EV or hybrid mode.

If you're delicate with the controls, this is an undemanding car to drive, but ultimately it lacks the polish of a Sportage or Ford Kuga.

Away from smooth roads, the car is too softly sprung and bouncy. It's okay around town, but down a 60mph rural road the suspension

TESTER'S NOTE

The PHEV can take a peak DC charging rate of 40kW, allowing its 18.3kWh battery to charge from 30-80% in 40 minutes. It takes 26 minutes for the Tiguan eHybrid's 19.7kWh battery to get from 5-80% – so less time for a bigger charge. **SP**



Luxury PHEV (above) had better materials and bigger screen than Deluxe petrol

Suspension struggles with the undulations and imperfections of UK roads

lollops and bounds to a point that it feels uncomfortable.

The petrol 7 is even less refined: the ride is busy and crashy over coarse surfaces and there's a discernible thump when you hit a pothole.

It handles slightly better, thanks in part to its lighter weight, but there's still a distinct lack of body control, and the poorly weighted steering doesn't help.

Its 1.6-litre engine is fine at a cruise, but ask for more and it becomes thrashy and unrefined – and not that quick, either, with the 0-62mph sprint taking 10.3sec.

You can have the petrol in Deluxe or Luxury trim, with the latter adding four-wheel drive and costing from £32,850.

Our Deluxe petrol test car didn't feel as well appointed as our Luxury PHEV. Sure, it comes with plenty of standard kit, and there are softer materials draped over the top of the doors and the dash, but the tinny interior trim, plasticky seat upholstery and unusually shaped gear selector make it feel pretty austere.

The PHEV is offered only in Luxury trim and gets a slightly different interior layout, better materials and a gear selector sited behind the steering wheel, rather than on the transmission tunnel, like in the Tiguan.

The central infotainment touchscreen is larger, too, at 14.8in compared with 13.2in.

As a solely touch-operated system, it frustrates in the same way that many other cars from China do. It may be responsive, but from a usability standpoint it's over-complicated: there are just too many menus and sub-menus for various functions, which means you're always taking your eyes off the road to adjust different settings.

Apple CarPlay and Android Auto are easy to connect your phone to wirelessly, at least, and swiping down from the top of the screen reveals various shortcut icons.

The 7's cabin is light and roomy. Rear accommodation is good enough for adults, with generous helpings of head and leg room.

There are numerous cubbyholes and storage bins, too; the space underneath the centre console is handy for larger items.

Less competitive is the boot capacity, at 412 litres (not including the petrol version's underfloor storage) – over 60 litres smaller than that of the Tiguan eHybrid.

If you can look past its unrefined driving characteristics and fiddly infotainment system, the 7 does have some appeal as a budget alternative. It has a practical interior, the PHEV manages a decent electric range and it beats similar cars on price. That said, the 7's European and Korean rivals are much easier to recommend.

SAM PHILLIPS

> **"The lighter petrol handles better than the PHEV, but there's still a distinct lack of body control"**

TECH SPEC

JAECOO 7 SHS LUXURY

Shows signs of promise with a practical interior and decent EV range, but rivals are more polished, more refined and better to drive

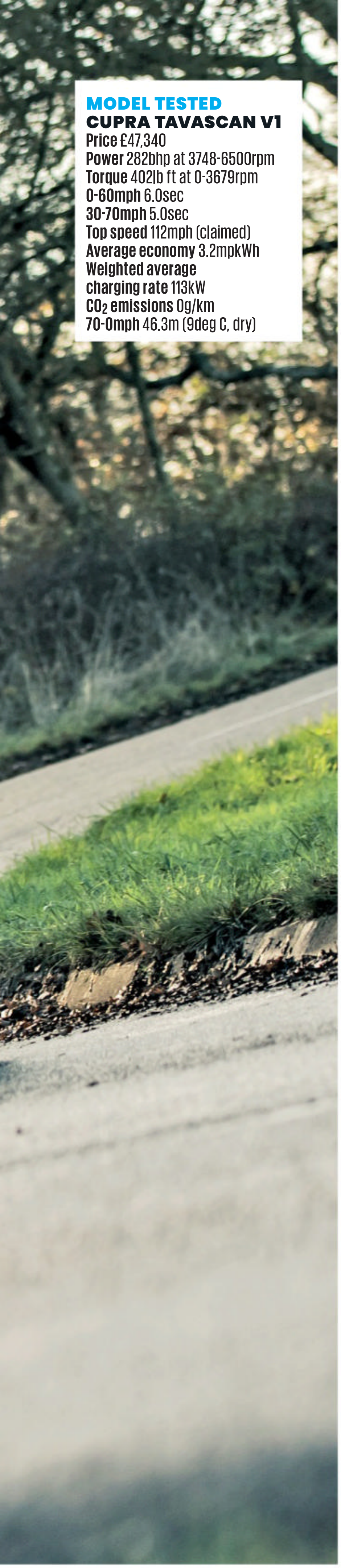
Price £35,065
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1499cc, turbocharged, petrol, plus electric motor
Power 201bhp
Torque 228lb ft
Gearbox CVT, FWD
Kerb weight 1795kg
0-62mph 8.5sec
Top speed 112mph
Battery 18.3kWh (usable)
Economy 403mpg
Electric range 57 miles
CO_2, tax band 29g/km, 8%
Rivals Citroën C5 Aircross, Kia Sportage

ROAD TESTS

AUTOCAR **ROAD TEST 5723**

CUPRA TAVASCAN

Has Martorell followed up the Born with another Volkswagen-beater?



MODEL TESTED

CUPRA TAVASCAN V1

Price £47,340
Power 282bhp at 3748-6500rpm
Torque 402lb ft at 0-3679rpm
0-60mph 6.0sec
30-70mph 5.0sec
Top speed 112mph (claimed)
Average economy 3.2mpkWh
Weighted average charging rate 113kW
CO_2 emissions 0g/km
70-0mph 46.3m (9deg C, dry)

Since its launch in 2021, the Cupra Born has become something of an Autocar favourite. An unexpected one, you might say, because the mechanical package is very similar indeed to the worthy but unspectacular Volkswagen ID 3. Clearly there's a bit of magic in the way Cupra can trim and set up a car.

It is therefore a logical corollary that Cupra can do the same thing with the VW ID 4. After all, the dynamic fruits of the larger version of the MEB platform are ripe for the picking. It has already spawned the sensible and roomy but unexciting Skoda Enyaq and the premium-ish Audi Q4 E-tron – surely there's room for a sporty version that's genuinely good to drive and amps up the luxury at the same time.

Enter the Cupra Tavascan. Call it a plus-sized Cupra Born, or a VW ID 4 with a dusting of cayenne pepper: we're expecting it to improve on the formula in subtle but significant ways.

DESIGN & ENGINEERING

★★★☆☆

PROS Proven mechanicals, jazzed up with slightly alternative styling
CONS There's no innovation here

As we alluded to in the intro, the fundamentals of the Tavascan are familiar and not massively exciting. You know the drill: it's the Volkswagen Group MEB platform, here in slightly more upmarket specification. This means that small battery packs and motors remain on the shelf, and the Tavascan is powered by at least a 77kWh (82kWh total capacity) battery and a 282bhp motor.

As with other Cupras lately, there are standard 'V' versions and faster 'VZ' (for 'veloz', or 'fast' in Spanish) ones. Here, we're testing the V, with a single permanent magnet synchronous motor at the rear. The VZ adds a 107bhp motor on the front axle for a combined output of 335bhp. The front motor is asynchronous, so that it can freewheel when not required and not cause drag.

Cupra has been able to hide the shared MEB bones moderately well. The Tavascan certainly sports a more dynamic face than the ID 4, and Cupra has managed this without resorting to putting a fake grille on the front. Like the recently facelifted Leon and Formentor, the Tavascan has a constellation of three triangles in each headlight – which is becoming something of a Cupra design cue. There are further nods to sportiness towards the rear of the car, with quite a prominent diffuser at the back, an almost Gurney flap-like spoiler and a coupé-SUV silhouette.

Concept was first shown back in 2019

Ultimately, it can't fully hide its MEB underpinnings in its proportions, with the car lacking a little width relative to its height, but the profile is still sleek and the drag coefficient is just 0.26 despite being taller than a conventional hatchback. At 4644mm in length, it is directly comparable to the Kia EV6 and Polestar 2, and it's those two rivals at the more dynamic end of an enormous and enormously competitive class, that the Tavascan has to beat.

While the Cupra Born is built in Zwickau, Germany, alongside its VW ID 3 twin, and most other Cupras are assembled in Seat's home of Martorell, Spain, the Tavascan is produced in Anhui. It's the first European-market MEB car to come out of China.

INTERIOR

★★★½☆

PROS Looks more interesting than VW ID siblings; generous space
CONS Quality doesn't stand up to close scrutiny; lack of physical controls

As is the norm on brand-new cars, the Tavascan sports an enormous central touchscreen (15in in diameter) that controls the majority of functions, but unlike many other cars there's more going on than just the screen. Cupra has seen fit to inject a bit of design appeal as well. Not all of it is strictly functional, but in an era when a lot of car interior design has been reduced to simply a wall of screens, Cupra's approach is very welcome.

Initial impressions are good, then. The central spine lends some interest, as do the copper-coloured accents, the V-shapes in the seats and the very organic shape of the dashboard and air vents.

Look more closely and go poking around, and the feeling of high quality doesn't last. A lot of the bits that look quite nice from a distance are simply hard plastic that doesn't even feel particularly solid. Our test car had its fair share of buzzes and rattles as well. The Tavascan also suffers from some of the inherited MEB components that were subject to plenty of criticism four years ago, and could have been replaced with better alternatives by now. Think of the imprecise mirror adjustment joystick, missing rear window switches, touch-sensitive steering wheel controls and electronic door handles that want to be pulled with just the right amount of force in order to work correctly. Meanwhile, the digital driver display is the same simplistic unit as in VW ID cars.

There are a few unforced errors as well. To turn on the heated steering wheel, you need to go several menus deep into the touchscreen (or use voice control), the space under the centre console could have been a storage tray but instead is simply carpeted, and the standard seats lack tilt and lumbar adjustment. The last of those does feature on higher trims, but on a car costing at least £47,340 you would expect that sort of stuff to be standard.

The rest of the Tavascan's interior packaging is largely the same as in other MEB SUVs, which means that it has class-typical space up front, and less outright leg room than rivals such as the Kia EV6 and Tesla Model Y, but a slightly better seating position in the back. It also has a usefully larger boot than the Kia, but as with the rest of the interior, the equipment seems a little mean. The Tavascan has a hatchback-style parcel shelf rather than a roller-cover, it has no handles to drop the rear seats remotely and, unless you shell out for the V2 trim level, there's no variable-height floor to even out the step when the rear seats are folded down. Like the other VW Group brands, Cupra hasn't managed to find room for a luggage space under the front bonnet. ▶

■ Coupé-SUV silhouette can look rather inelegant, but the small spoiler lip that's integrated into the rear light bar is a neat detail. Like so many SUVs with a sloping tailgate, the Tavascan has no rear wiper even though water and dirt still sit on the rear windscreen.

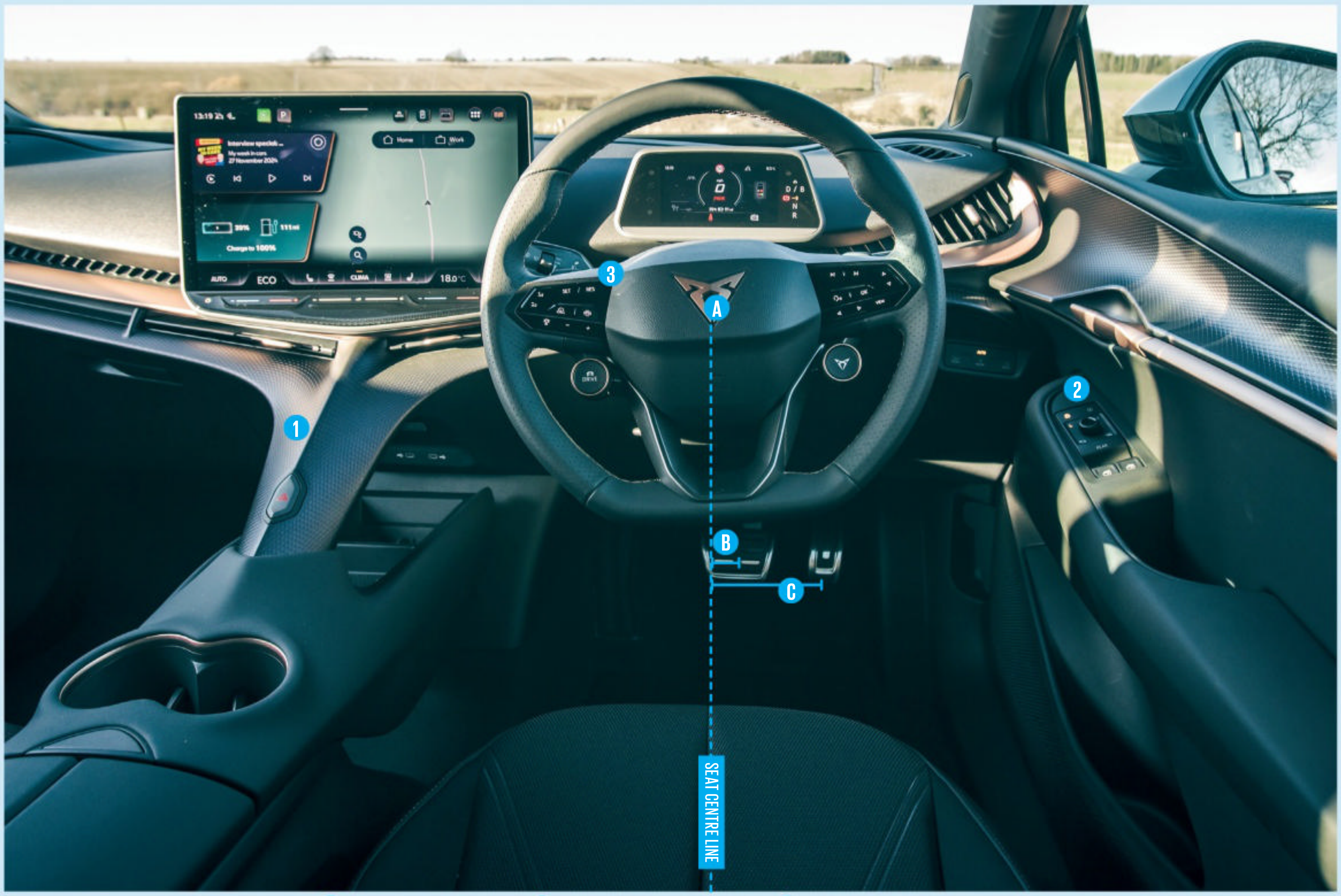
■ These electronic door handles were first introduced on the VW ID 4 and urgently need retiring. Even when you squeeze them gently, they flex and feel cheap. If you pull them a bit too hard, you activate the mechanical release. Doing so feels like you've broken it.

PHOTOGRAPHY JACK HARRISON

① Central spar that branches out into the air vents is a nice design detail, but it does make access to the charging pads harder. Like the door trims, it's made from hard plastic.

② We're glad that it has mirror-adjustment controls at all, but these ones, borrowed from the VW ID 4, feel cheap and flimsy. ID 4-style dash pod has outstayed its welcome too.

③ Touch-sensitive controls are easy to activate accidentally and hard to activate on purpose. Our car didn't have the head-up display, and would say so every time we brushed the button.



WHEEL AND PEDAL ALIGNMENT Ⓐ Steering offset 0mm Ⓑ Brake offset 40mm right Ⓒ Accelerator offset 170mm right. Driving position is typical for an MEB car, being medium-high, with fairly central pedals. Unlike the VW ID 4, the driver's display doesn't adjust along with the steering column.

MULTIMEDIA

★★★⯪☆

PROS Generally easy to use; configurable; responsive
CONS Still not free of glitches; tricky to sign in to user account and phone app

The Tavascan's infotainment system is also a fundamentally familiar one, although Cupra of course puts its own spin on the shared MIB4 interface. The cabin temperature and volume are controlled through the touch bar (which lights up), leaving the screen free for navigation and media.

The home screen is not as configurable as in the VW equivalent, but it should nevertheless be possible to get the functions you find useful to be displayed at all times. You can also pick three functions for the permanent shortcut bar at the top, and a further configurable shortcut bar appears when you swipe down from the top of the screen. This can include one-press 'buttons' to disable the lane keeping assistance and overspeed warning.

Compared with the previous-generation system, this iteration is much smoother and less prone to glitches and hang-ups, but that pull-down bar is the one major exception: every once in a while, it would reset to the factory presets, which rather undoes its usefulness.

PERFORMANCE

★★★⯪☆

PROS Quite quick; freewheeling mode for regen
CONS Controls lack progression; only two regen modes; brake fade

The current generation of the MEB platform uses a 282bhp rear motor as standard and, as you might imagine, that's enough for plentiful performance, even in a car that weighs 2129kg on Horiba MIRA's weighbridge.

As a result, it is 1.5sec faster to 60mph than the Kia EV6, and 2.1sec quicker than the Renault Scenic E-Tech Electric, with the gap only widening at higher speeds. Curiously, the Ford Explorer with the same drivetrain is a mite quicker still.

The battery's state of charge does have a significant effect on performance, but given it is more than quick enough anyway, that's hardly a major demerit. Even with the battery nearly flat, the Tavascan is quicker than the EV6 with a full charge.

On the road, and away from the academic pursuit of a few tenths here and there, the Tavascan can feel a bit last generation, particularly next to the Kia. Where the Korean car has perfectly progressive controls and regen that can be tailored to your preferences, the Cupra is more prescriptive.

You have only two options for the regenerative braking: D mode is close to a freewheeling mode (although it will sometimes blend in a bit of retardation when descending hills), while B ramps up the trailing-throttle regen but stops short of offering true one-pedal driving.

Meanwhile, the accelerator is too sensitive in Normal mode and plain unusable in Sport or Cupra mode. Some testers defaulted to Eco mode, but that requires you to push past a kickdown switch to liberate full power, and the car will always revert to Normal mode when you turn it off. The brake pedal, too, lacks progression, particularly at the top of the travel. As a result, doing smooth 'limo driver' stops is frustratingly difficult.

The braking performance itself leaves something to be desired as well. While a stopping distance from 70mph of 46.3m is perfectly respectable, by our sixth successive stop it had lengthened to 50.9m. That's more fade than we have measured from most cars and is likely to be due to the fitment of drum brakes on the rear axle. In practice, the electric motor will usually do most of the braking on a long mountain descent, although it won't if the battery is already full.

RIDE AND HANDLING

★★★★☆

PROS Rear-drive balance; uncorrupted and intuitive steering; composed ride
CONS Not noticeably more fun than other MEB cars; over-cautious ESC

When the road gets twisty is where the Cupra Born really differentiates itself from the almost mechanically identical VW ID 3, so can the Tavascan do the same?

Certainly, it feels like a Cupra, and it's a credit to the young brand's chassis engineers that it has already established something of a dynamic identity. Like other recent Cupras, the Tavascan has steering that is light and quick, but not nervous or flighty, and the car has a neat rear-drive balance.

Unfortunately, it stops at this tantalising glimpse of a driver's car. The steering never gains any genuine feel or feedback, and while the balance is fundamentally sound, the subtle sense of pivoting around the driver's hips that the Born has is absent here. The Tavascan feels hampered by its size and weight, suffering from just that bit more lethargy than you want from a driver's car.

The traction and stability control remain an annoyance in a well-balanced rear-wheel-drive car. Even in ESC Sport mode, the systems are very restrictive and never let the car take any attitude on the power.

By all accounts, the Tavascan is still a nicely handling EV, but it doesn't go over and above a Ford Explorer or Kia EV6 the way it should in order to stake its identity on handling appeal.

Cupra sent us an entry-level V1 car, which is unusual in today's car market in combining a reasonable level of standard equipment with relatively modest wheels. For an SUV like this, 19in is pretty small, and allows a generous tyre sidewall. Together with Cupra's typical firm but well-controlled damping, this gives the Tavascan a fairly level, well-cushioned ride. It's not exactly soft, though, and can get slightly busy, with the worst potholes eliciting some harshness.

We recorded cabin noise of 68dBA at 70mph, which puts the Tavascan exactly level with the Kia EV6 and Renault Scenic.

Even our entry-level car came with the full suite of driver assistance technology, including adaptive cruise control with automatic lane following and blindspot monitoring. The VW Group's shared ADAS suite is fairly mature, with adaptive cruise control that's generally smooth and lane keeping assistance and speed limit recognition that work better than most. They're still far from infallible, and if the infotainment screen is working correctly, they're easy to turn off.

As mentioned earlier, you can configure shortcuts for them in a pull-down menu, but these shortcuts sometimes reset to factory settings. There is also no option for standard cruise control.

BUYING & OWNING

★★★☆☆

PROS Decent efficiency; maintains DC charging speed in cold conditions

CONS Far too expensive; average charging speed; gremlins and usability misses

You might expect that building the Tavascan in China would be a way to make it more affordable, but that does not seem to bear out in practice. The entry-level V1 trim starts at £47,340, and our test car had the essential Winter Pack (heated seats and a heat pump), adding £1335 on top of that.

That sort of pricing decidedly puts it at the premium end of the segment with the Polestar 2 and BMW iX1, which the Tavascan's interior quality and driving experience can't fully back up.

Cupra mitigates the price issue with some favourable PCP deals that put it in line with the long-range single-motor versions of the Tesla Model Y and Kia EV6. Even so, rivals like the Hyundai Ioniq 5 and Renault Scenic E-Tech Electric, plus the mechanically similar Skoda Enyaq and VW ID 4, are significantly cheaper, whether outright or monthly.

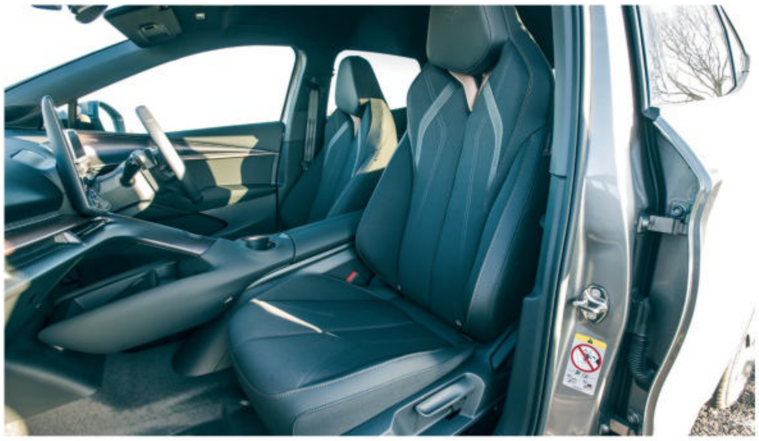
V2 trim, priced at £53,835, adds 21in wheels, adaptive dampers, electrically adjustable heated seats, matrix LED headlights, a sunroof, an upgraded hi-fi system and a variable-height boot floor. VZ1 adds the front motor on top of that.

The efficiency our Tavascan returned was broadly typical for this kind of EV in temperatures that were around 5deg C for most of our test. Efficiency of 3.2mpkWh still makes for a very useful 246 miles, and based on our experience with the Enyaq in summer, we would expect to see 3.4mpkWh in mixed summer motoring.

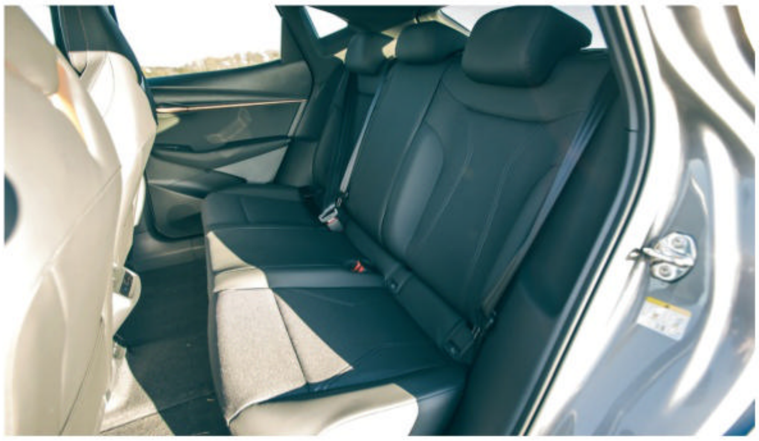
Despite the cold conditions, the Tavascan was able to match, and slightly exceed, its quoted DC rapid-charging speed. A weighted average of 113kW is in line with what you can expect from other MEB cars and the Scenic, but down significantly on the Polestar 2 and the EV6 and Ioniq 5.

The Tavascan also suffers from quite a number of minor annoyances that nevertheless add up to something significant over time. They don't really fall into any other category, so we will discuss them here. Our car suffered from a few glitches such as the configurable shortcuts resetting every so often and the electric tailgate not always opening on the first try.

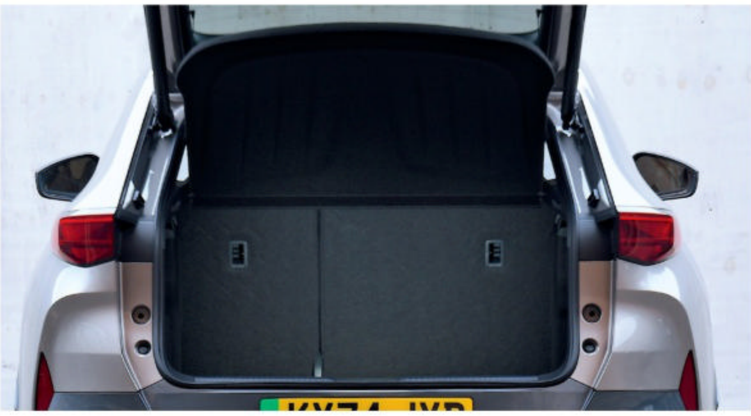
Connecting the app to the car and activating the online services (such as the connected nav and voice control) is needlessly difficult. Most infuriatingly, the car turns itself off when you unbuckle your seatbelt and lift your weight off the seat. This means that when you drive off and realise you need to take something out of the boot, once you're ready to go again you have to go through the whole rigmarole of turning various systems off, selecting the right driving mode and waiting for your phone to pair. This is common to all MEB cars but no less annoying for it. ▸



FRONT Leg room 1100mm, head room 1095mm. Standard manual seats in the V1 lack lumbar and tilt adjustment. V2 and up get electric adjustment.



REAR Leg room 785mm, head room 940mm. Rear space is about average for the class, but that's still more than enough for adults.

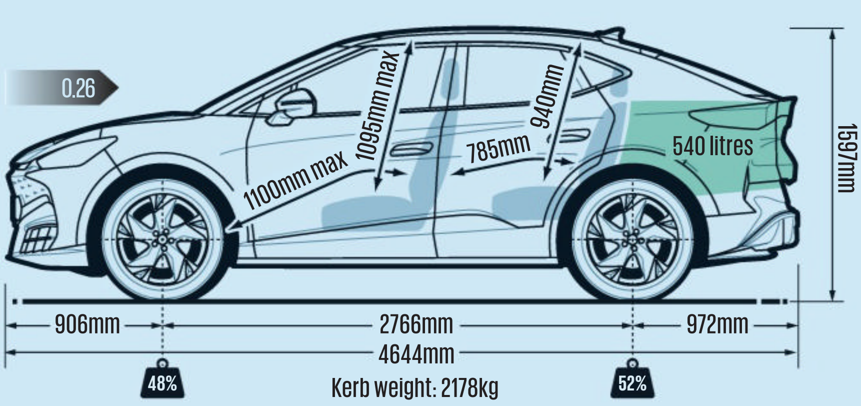


BOOT Length 920-1700mm, width 1010-1280mm, height 580-790mm. Boot is a decent size but lacks a variable-height floor in V1 trim.

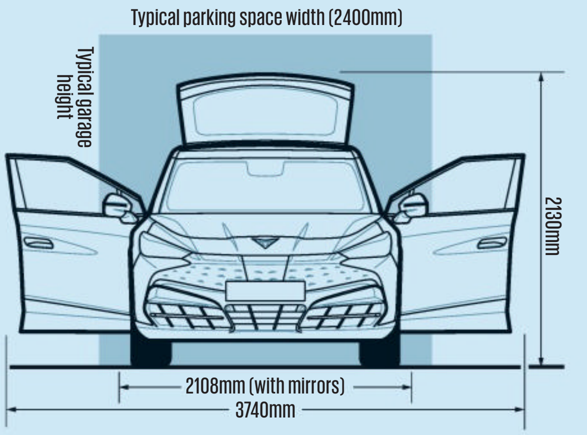
"There's a bit more lethargy than you want from a driver's car"

TEST RESULTS

DIMENSIONS


0.26
1100mm max
1095mm max
785mm
940mm
540 litres
1597mm
906mm
2766mm
972mm
4644mm
48%
Kerb weight: 2178kg
52%

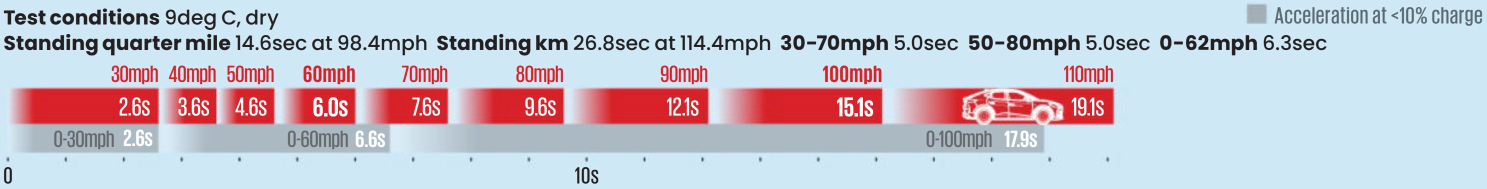
PARKING


Typical parking space width (2400mm)
Typical garage height
2130mm
2108mm (with mirrors)
3740mm

ACCELERATION

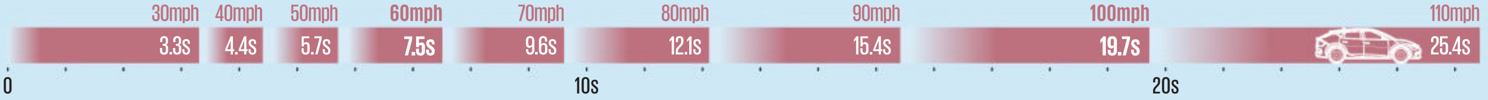
Test conditions 9deg C, dry

Standing quarter mile 14.6sec at 98.4mph **Standing km** 26.8sec at 114.4mph **30-70mph** 5.0sec **50-80mph** 5.0sec **0-62mph** 6.3sec



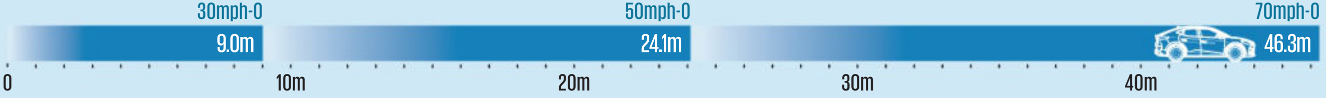
Kia EV6 84kWh RWD GT-Line S (2024, 14deg C, damp)

Standing quarter mile 15.9sec at 91.5mph **Standing km** 28.3sec at 115mph **30-70mph** 6.3sec **50-80mph** 6.4sec **0-62mph** 7.8sec

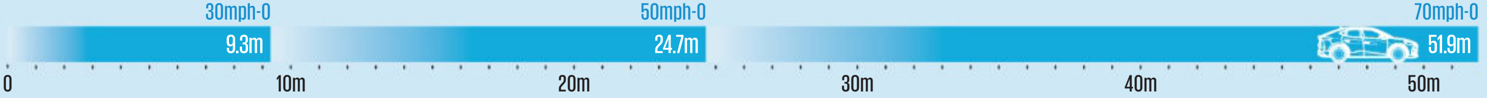


BRAKING

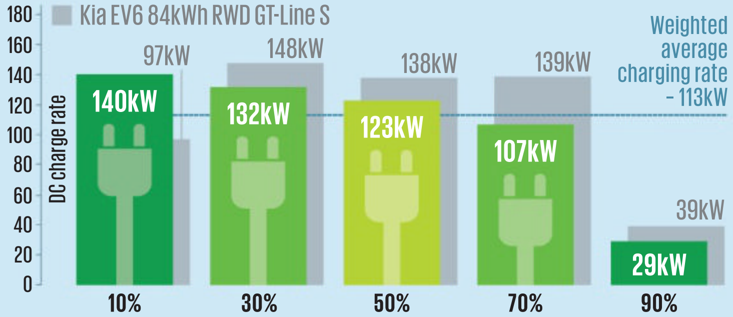
Dry 60-0mph 2.85sec



Wet 60-0mph 2.71sec

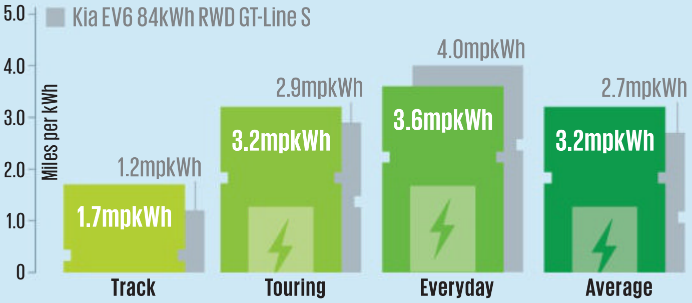


RAPID-CHARGING PERFORMANCE

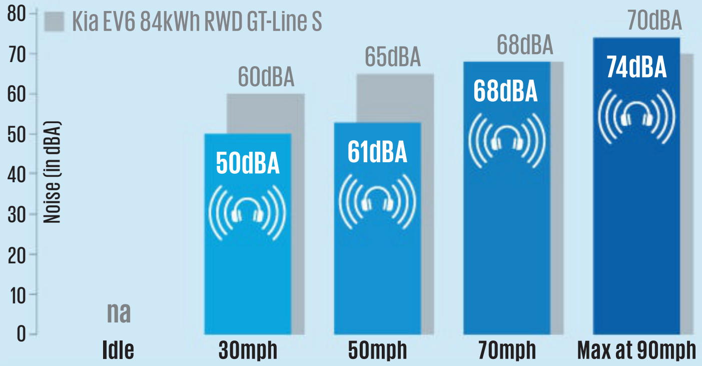


RUNNING EFFICIENCY

WLTP 4.1mpkWh (combined) **Test range** 246/246/277 miles (average/touring/everyday)

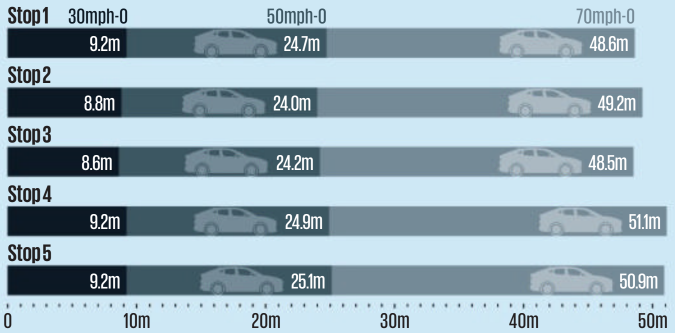


CABIN NOISE



BRAKING ENDURANCE

Fade variance 70-0m – stop 1 vs stop 5: 2.3m



PETER LIDDIARD

THE SMALL PRINT Power-to-weight and torque-to-weight figures are calculated using manufacturer's claimed kerb weight. © 2025, Haymarket Media Group Ltd. Test results may not be reproduced without editor's written permission. For information on the Tavascan, contact Customer Services, Cupra UK, Yeomans Drive, Blakelands, Milton Keynes, MK14 5AN (0800 049 7106, cupraofficial.co.uk)

MANUFACTURER'S SPECIFICATION

CUPRA TAVASCAN V1

On-the-road price £47,340
Price as tested £48,675
Value after 3yrs/36k miles £22,875
Contract hire £453 pcm (6+36 months/30,000 miles)
Typical PCP £512 pcm (£7300 deposit + 36 months/30,000 miles)
Insurance group 34E

FITTED EQUIPMENT

Standard 19in alloy wheels, LED headlights, heated steering wheel, three-zone climate control, keyless entry, electric tailgate, adaptive cruise control **Optional** Winter Pack (heated seats, heat pump, heat insulating windscreen) £1335 **Also available** Premium paint £695-£995

MOTOR & BATTERY

Installation Rear, transverse, RWD
Type Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 282bhp at 3748-6500rpm
Torque 402lb ft at 0-3679rpm
Battery type NMC
Capacity 82.0/77.0kWh (total/usable)
Voltage 400V (352V nominal)
Power to weight 129bhp per tonne
Torque to weight 185lb ft per tonne

GEARBOX

Type 1-spd reduction gear
Reduction ratio 7.9:1
mph per 1000rpm 10.9
rpm at 70/80mph 6415/7332

CHASSIS & BODY

Construction Steel and aluminium monocoque
Weight/as tested 2178kg/2129kg
Drag coefficient 0.26
Wheels 8.0Jx19in (f), 9.0Jx19in (r)
Tyres 235/55 R19 101T (f), 255/50 R19 103T (r), Hankook iOn Evo SUV EV **Spare** None (mobility kit)

SUSPENSION & STEERING

Front MacPherson struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar **Rear** Multi-link, coil springs, anti-roll bar
Steering EPAS, rack and pinion; 2.2 turns lock to lock; 10.2m turning circle

BRAKES

Front 358mm ventilated discs
Rear 280mm drums **Handbrake type** Electronic, automatic

SAFETY

Euro NCAP rating 5 stars (2024)
Adult occupant 89%, child occupant 86%, vulnerable road users 80%, safety assist 79%

EMISSIONS & TAX

CO$_2$ 0g/km
BIK at 20/40% pcm £16/£32

VERDICT

Competent, but not very compelling or memorable

★★★☆☆

As more and more products are spun off the same mechanical package, inevitably you end up with cars that lack a purpose in life. The Cupra Tavascan is one such car that is perfectly all right in most respects, even quite pleasant in some. You wouldn't be displeased if your 'VW ID 4 or similar' at the rental desk turned out to be a Tavascan.

Unlike the Cupra Born, the Tavascan doesn't have the delicate handling or upgraded interior to lift it above its MEB platform peers. Meanwhile, its practicality, usability, comfort and range are all at or slightly below the class average, despite Cupra demanding above-average money for it.

The medium electric crossover class is one of today's most competitive, and you needn't look hard to find rivals that make a much more compelling case for themselves.

TESTERS' NOTES

ILLYA VERPRAET
Like all Seats and Cupras, the Tavascan is named after a town in Spain. Tavascan is a ski resort in the Pyrenees with a hydroelectric plant that uses underground waterfalls to generate its electricity.

MATT SAUNDERS
After all the criticism of the haptic steering wheel controls, it's strange that this new EV still has them. After all, petrol Cupras have the same wheel but with proper buttons.

FACELIFT FIXES

- Lower the price.
- Make the interior quality match the style.
- Find some more Born-like driving dynamics.

RANKING RIVALS

	1	2	3	4	5
	POLESTAR 2 LONG RANGE SINGLE MOTOR Not the cheapest, but a very capable, premium-feeling EV that's great to drive.	**HYUNDAI IONIQ 5 83KWH ADVANCE** Comfy, lounge-like and good value, with excellent EV credentials. Slightly boaty handling.	**RENAULT SCENIC E-TECH ELECTRIC LONG RANGE TECHNO** A smaller car but still outstanding value. Inviting, sophisticated and with a long range.	**KIA EV6 RWD AIR** Unusual poise and balance. Good rapid-charging potential and an interesting cabin. Expensive on PCP.	**SKODA ENYAQ 85 EDITION** Roomy, inviting interior with good efficiency and laid-back dynamics. Best of the MEB cars.
	★★★★⯪	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
Price	£46,950	£43,300	£40,940	£45,575	£44,300
Power, torque	295bhp, 361lb ft	225bhp, 258lb ft	215bhp, 221lb ft	225bhp, 258lb ft	282bhp, 402lb ft
0-62mph, top speed	6.1sec, 127mph	7.5sec, 114mph	7.9sec, 106mph	7.7sec, 115mph	6.7sec, 111mph
Range, economy	406 miles, 4.2mpkWh	354 miles, 3.9mpkWh	379 miles, 3.6mpkWh	347 miles, 3.9mpkWh	357 miles, 4.2mpkWh

AUTOCAR **ROAD TEST 5724**

AUDI RS6

Audi's line of ICE-powered performance estates goes out with a bang

If you had stepped out onto the spotlessly clean floor of Audi's Böllinger Höfe production facility five years ago, the place would have been littered with R8 supercars in various stages of construction. Had you done the same thing three years later, you'd have seen a blend of R8s and Audi's then new electric super-saloon, the E-tron GT. And today? Well, today the plant no longer rings to the wail of V10 engines firing up for the first time, because with the R8 now having retired, Audi's most hand-labour-intensive production line is entirely for the E-tron GT, which rolls into life near-silently.

However, for a short period in recent times, the E-tron GT was joined by another car at this small facility, which has always been reserved for Audi's most revered creations. It's a car that, like the R8, carries an enormous petrol engine, albeit one wooflier in nature than the supercar's V10.

We're talking about the RS6 Avant GT, which is limited to 660 examples worldwide and whose hand-finishing at the Böllinger Höfe plant is justified by its unique bodywork, requiring a level of finishing that the regular RS6 line can't easily manage. This is also the most powerful combustion-engined production Audi there has ever been, shading even the last-gasp R8 GT.

This car is, in many ways, a farewell to the fast, all-conquering Audi wagon with four-wheel drive and at least eight cylinders (there have been as many as V10s in the past). The RS6 GT is therefore both a statement piece and a lovingly wrought valedictory special that references one of Audi's best-loved racing cars.

What we will now discover is just how fast this rip-roaring family car really is, and how lucky those 660 owners should count themselves.

DESIGN & ENGINEERING

★★★★☆

PROS Not just a set of decals; lacks the complexity of a plug-in hybrid
CONS Could be lighter, given the CFRP panels; not at all subtle

First, know that the GT is more than just an RS6 with a sticker set – although it is an absolutely spectacular sticker set, evoking the Audi 90 Quattro GTO from 1989. That car raced in the American IMSA championship and is surely one of the most distinctive competition cars of all time.

As for the GT, you can also have it in black or grey, at no extra cost, but most testers agreed that this would be rather missing the point. If you fancy a mega-estate that's more subtle, there's always Alpina's 250-off B5 GT Touring, although even that car has canards.

The RS6 GT came about as a project for the apprentices at Audi's Neckarsulm plant. In 2020, a dozen

MODEL TESTED

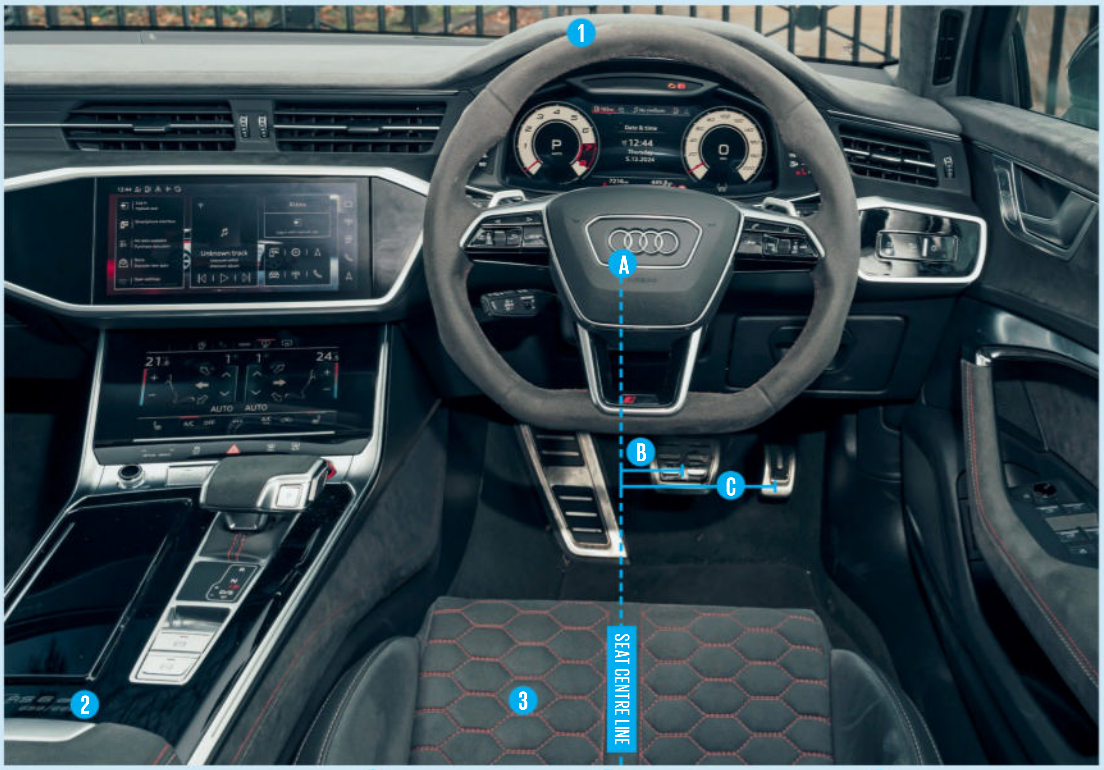
AUDI RS6 AVANT GT

Price £176,975
Power 621bhp at 6000rpm
Torque 627lb ft at 2300-4500rpm
0-60mph 3.2sec
30-70mph 2.7sec
Top speed 190mph (claimed)
Average economy 17.7mpg
Touring economy 26.3mpg
CO_2 emissions 277-289g/km
70-0mph 44.5m (7deg C, damp/drying)

① Dinamica-trimmed rim might have felt out of place in a family estate but the GT pulls it off. The suede-like material is used generously elsewhere in the car.

② The GTs are numbered – and not generically but individually. This car's etching on the transmission tunnel reveals it to be car 659 out of the total of 660 that Audi is building.

③ New bucket seats are the most hardcore ever fitted to a production RS6 and feature beautiful carbon shells – a visual treat for back-seat passengers.



WHEEL AND PEDAL ALIGNMENT Ⓐ Steering offset 0mm Ⓑ Brake offset 60mm right Ⓒ Accelerator offset 190mm right. Seats are adjusted manually – that's a surprise in an RS6 but chimes with the GT's persona.

of them – hailing from bodywork, mechanics and tooling – worked on the RS6 GTO project for six months with the support of Audi Design. The RS6 GT is effectively the production version of the concept, being remarkably faithful to the design but with even more power from the 4.0-litre V8.

The other obvious change from the regular RS6 – hardly a shrinking violet itself – is the wheels. They hark back to those fitted to Audi S models in the 1990s and early 2000s, such as the 8L Audi S3, although RS6 GT's are much bigger at 22in. The wheels are also much more aggressively dished than those on the older cars. Kerbable? Oh yes, but also extraordinarily striking.

More visual tweaks come in the form of a new splitter and a gloss black treatment for the front grilles, making the car look even wider than it is, as well as a carbonfibre bonnet and carbonfibre front wings. They feature cavernous air outlets behind the front wheels, and there's a different rear spoiler with a central spar too. All of which explains the need to send the car to Böllinger Höfe for finishing by just seven specially trained employees.

To the oily bits. For duty in the GT, the 4.0-litre TFSI V8 is unchanged and makes 621bhp and 627lb ft. It is manifestly old-school in its application, lacking any form of hybridisation. It drives through an eight-speed torque-converter automatic gearbox, then through Audi's Quattro permanent four-wheel drive system, with its locking centre differential and Quattro Sport rear limited-slip differential.

Meanwhile, the suspension is radically altered, with the inclusion of RS Sports Suspension Pro.

Instead of air chambers and adaptive dampers, the GT is fitted with height-adjustable coilovers that also use dampers adjustable for rates of compression (low and high speed) and rebound (one universal control). Changing the settings isn't the work of a moment, particularly at the back, and, depending on what you're altering, can require the car to be lifted and some cladding to be removed. Most owners will, we suspect, leave the GT in its factory settings. Figures? There are 13 'clicks' for each of the three damper variables, and on the road Audi recommends rebound at 6 (front) and 10 (rear), low-speed compression at 8 and 8, and high-speed compression at 10 and 6. For circuit work, these figures respectively become 4 and 3, 2 and 7, and 4 and 4. The owners' manual is also at pains to state the damping should never be set to opposing extremes at each end of the car, lest the handling balance becomes dangerous: "The difference between the value on the two axles must not be greater than 9 clicks!"

Elsewhere, the car's anti-roll bars are 30% stiffer at the front compared with the regular RS6 and 80% at the rear. Note also that the basic spring rate has also increased, although Audi doesn't say by how much.

As for weight, our test car came in at 2144kg fully fuelled. That's more than the claimed 2075kg but notably less than the regular RS6 we tested in 2020, which was 2217kg.

INTERIOR

★★★★☆

PROS Sound cockpit ergonomics; cavernous space; not totally OTT

CONS Manual seats might surprise some; lacks M5 CS-style X-factor

Inside, this is mostly standard RS6. Audi hasn't gone full 'Clubsport' spec and stripped out the rear ▸

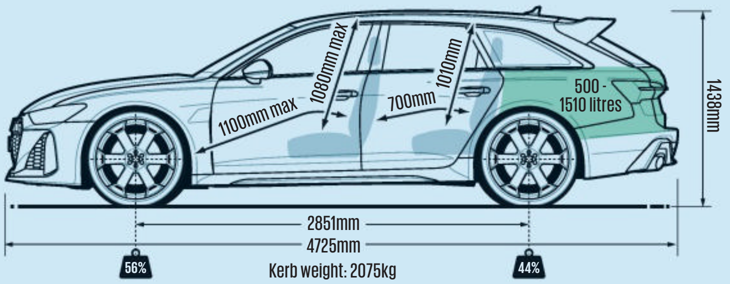
■ The regular RS6 comes with air springs and adaptive dampers but the GT gets passive coil springs and manually adjustable dampers. Air springs are optional, mind.

■ Bonnet and front wings are made from carbonfibre, which sounds like an expensive insurance claim waiting to happen but you can't fault Audi's commitment to the GT.

PHOTOGRAPHY MAX EDLESTON

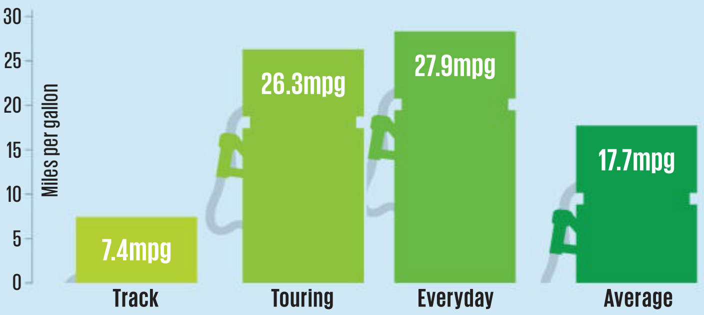
TEST RESULTS

DIMENSIONS



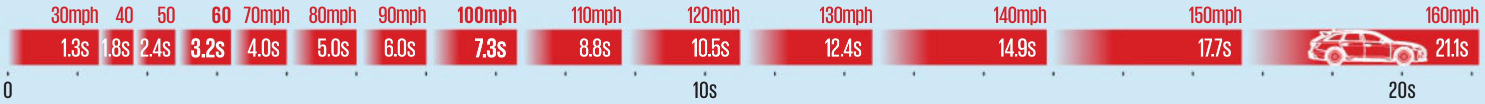
RUNNING EFFICIENCY

WLTP 23.1mpg (combined) **Test range** 284/422/448 miles (average/touring/everyday)



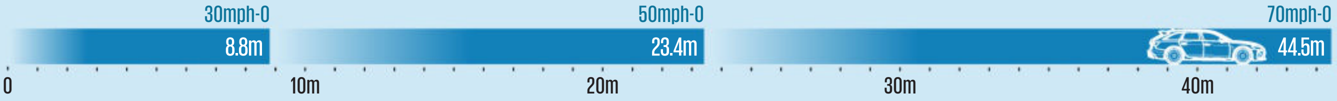
ACCELERATION

Test conditions 7deg C, damp/drying
Standing quarter mile 11.4sec at 124.5mph **Standing km** 20.7sec at 158.3mph **30-70mph** 2.7sec **30-70mph in fourth** 4.2sec **0-62mph** 3.3sec

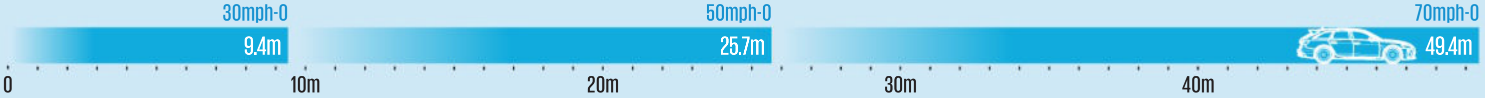


BRAKING

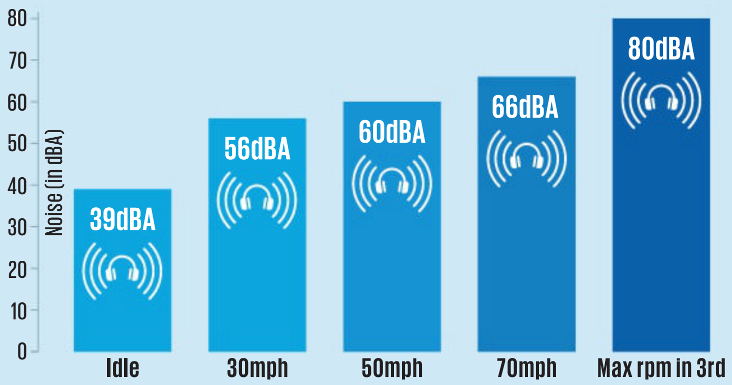
Dry 60-0mph 2.51sec



Wet 60-0mph 2.72sec



CABIN NOISE



MANUFACTURER'S SPECIFICATION

AUDI RS6 AVANT GT

On-the-road price £176,975
Price as tested £176,975
Insurance group 50

ENGINE

Installation Front, longitudinal, 4WD
Type V8, 3996cc, twin-turbocharged, petrol
Power 621bhp at 6000rpm
Torque 627lb ft at 2300-4500rpm
Redline 6800rpm
Specific output 155bhp per litre
Power to weight 299bhp per tonne
Torque to weight 302lb ft per tonne

GEARBOX

Type 8-spd automatic
rpm in top gear at 70/80mph 1751/2001

CHASSIS & BODY

Construction Steel and aluminium monocoque
Weight/as tested 2075kg/2144kg
Wheels 10.5Jx22in
Tyres 285/30 ZR22 XL, Continental SportContact 7

SUSPENSION & STEERING

Front and rear Multi-link, coil springs, manually adjustable dampers, anti-roll bar
Steering EPAS, rack and pinion; 2.4 turns lock to lock; 12.1m turning circle

For information on the RS6 GT Avant, contact Audi Customer Services, PO Box 9004, Leeds, LS91 9WA (0800 699 888, audi.co.uk)

"In the real world, very little can live with an RS6 GT"

PETER LIDDIARD

◂ seats, à la Alfa Romeo Giulia GTAm or Porsche Taycan Turbo GT.

Which isn't to say that the GT's cabin isn't purposeful. You sit in superb carbonfibre-backed buckets, which are just as supportive but more comfortable than those from M or AMG. Most of the leather is replaced with grippy red and copper-stitched microsuede.

Even so, the environment isn't as in-your-face techy as the latest generation of Audis, which is a good thing. There's no shortage of screens, with a digital gauge cluster and a split-level central touchscreen, but there is a subtlety about them. The lower one lets you quickly adjust the climate control and toggle various driver assistance systems, while the upper one controls all the multimedia, sat-nav and vehicle settings. Combined with a small but well-chosen selection of physical buttons, it all works well, and everything you touch feels solid and high quality.

All of which is very nice – and just a little incongruous in a car as savagely quick as the RS6 GT is...

PERFORMANCE

★★★★⯪

PROS Monstrously quick in any weather; charming V8 wallop
CONS Gearbox isn't DCT-quick; V8 is beginning to feel laggy

The 7.3sec 0-100mph time our GT recorded at Horiba MIRA is five-tenths quicker than that of the RS6 Avant we tested in 2020 – a car with 30bhp or so less than its esteemed, limited-edition relation. What the numbers alone don't reveal is that while the standard car logged its figures on dry Tarmac, the GT did it in the damp. This is a monstrously quick car with heaps of traction, and in fact that 7.3sec 0-100mph time is two-tenths quicker than the hot-off-the-press BMW M5, and in saloon form at that. It's notable that, despite the BMW's vastly more powerful hybrid set-up, just 4bhp per tonne separates the two cars.

Equally, in a world of increasingly hybridised alternatives, the distinct turbo lag of the big V8, along with the fact that it doesn't truly hit its stride before about 3000rpm, does date the RS6 driving experience somewhat, especially if you're not in quite the right gear and portion of the rev range on the exits of corners. The same is true for the shift quality from the ZF gearbox. It's good and predictably so but no longer feels as clinical as it might. This driveline is still a real charmer, mind, and when that V8 does grip the chassis, you know about it. In the real world, very little can live with an RS6 GT.

Lastly, braking. The GT is fitted with carbon-ceramic discs as standard, and with 440mm of diameter at the front, they fill the space behind those fat white spokes quite outrageously. They're effective too – more effective than they are communicative, if truth be told.

RIDE & HANDLING

★★★★☆

PROS Immensely composed and surprisingly delicate; huge grip
CONS Less relaxing than an ordinary RS6; always feels its size

The equation here is simple. To become an RS6 GT, the regular car gives away a small but notable portion of its surprisingly high levels of rolling refinement, and in return it attains a level of precision, response and transparency hitherto unseen on an RS6 of any vintage.

This manifests most obviously in the GT's steering. It has a levity about it that the regular car doesn't, such that you can twirl it in a way that allows you to forget just how much metal is strung out behind you. There's also no doubt that, in the GT, the tail of the car follows the nose through corners with a unity the standard car can't quite capture. There's also an enjoyable simplicity about this car. Once you're up and running, you can't fuss about with the suspension behaviour, and the mere knowledge of that fact is quite liberating, most testers thought.

Equally, this is a less rounded product than the regular car. The magic of the old BMW M5 CS was that it somehow managed to improve the M5 recipe in terms of both engagement and comfort. The RS6 GT doesn't pull off the same trick. The primary ride is good enough and makes for easy daily driving in the factory damper settings, but there's a localised lack of absorption at each corner of the car in terms of secondary ride pitter-patter and potholes etc. It's not why anyone buys an Audi RS6.

BUYING & OWNING

★★★⯪☆

PROS Residuals ought to be pretty strong; rarity; still very easy to use
CONS Supercar-expensive; economy is so-so next to PHEVs

On one hand the GT is an estate that costs as much as a well-optioned Porsche 911 Turbo S, and on the other it is sold out. Such is the allure of what will surely be the final car of its type (the next 'RS6' will almost certainly be electric). We can see the appeal. That said, the regular RS6 offers 95% of what the GT can do, and is easier to rub along with, if no more economical. Those who buy the GT will be doing so for its rarity and its considerable significance in the history of the brand. It is arguably the most extreme estate ever made.

VERDICT

Retro visual charm meets unprecedented dynamism in big-hearted Audi estate

★★★★☆

The RS6 GT is the eye-wateringly expensive mega-estate nobody needed, although you could say something similar about the BMW M5 CS – and look at the plaudits that garnered. This car was never going to rewrite the way fast Audis drive, but it noticeably heightens the delicacy, response and, in certain circumstances, raw adjustability of an already excellent machine. It also has a streak of individuality that's rarely seen in Ingolstadt's wares. Audi should look to carry the ethos of the RS6 GT forward into its upcoming RS-badged PHEV and EV models: the speed, finesse and attitude.

RIVALS

1

ALPINA B5 GT TOURING
From £127,900
★★★★⯪

2

PORSCHE TAYCAN TURBO SPORT TURISMO
From £134,800
★★★★⯪

3 **AUDI RS6 GT**

4

BMW M5 TOURING
From £113,405
★★★⯪☆

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MATT SAUNDERS

Testing, testing

IONITY
9:41
Wallet
Polestar 3
3

Key card? No thanks. Digital key card? Oh, for crying out loud…

This could be public enemy number one on the ever-expanding list of utterly hopeless and infuriating automotive technologies that nobody asked for. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you keyless operation.

Passive keyless entry (PKE) is how it's known in the industry. It invites you to leave your keys in your pocket and unlocks the car automatically as you approach. Apparently it was pioneered on a Chevrolet Corvette in 1993. But in that case, as a little preview of the industry-wide absurdity to follow, once inside the car you had to take the keys from your pocket or bag anyway to start the key using the ignition barrel.

My first experience with a PKE system was on the third-generation (K12) Nissan Micra of 2002. Autocar's long-term test car was driven to Bedford Autodrome as a support car one day when I was on work experience. On occasions such as those, keys for parked test cars would commonly be chucked onto the cowl (the exterior join of bonnet and windscreen) so that they wouldn't somehow be inexplicably locked inside or disappear into someone's pocket.

Life was much simpler before this 2002 Nissan Micra

> **"It whacks itself on the brickwork like a half-loosed catapult"**

You can guess what happened. The key wasn't needed to open the car, so the door opened at the first tug of the handle and the tester in question assumed that the Micra had been left open and the key must be inside.

The car duly started. He never noticed that the key was actually where it should have been – on the cowl – to begin with, nor when it quietly slid off while he was exiting the Bedford pit lane to drive 50 miles home. And on arriving, he gained an immobile Micra for as long as it took to get a spare key sent from Nissan.

Today, quite possibly thanks to idiots like us, cars with PKE usually sound an alarm if they're running but suddenly aren't in the presence of the key. But things have got worse in so many more respects as other largely pointless peripheral 'aids' have been added.

I've just tested a Polestar 3, which has a Tesla-style credit-card-thin key card with no buttons at all. This 'key' needs to be put into an ugly, bulky case in order to be fixed to your key ring – but I will forgive that much, because why not just slip it into your wallet or purse instead?

The trouble is, the card has no buttons at all, so if you're crossing a car park and your passengers reach the car before you do, you can't unlock it for them or open the boot until you get close enough to trigger the sensors automatically. I dare say you could download a phone app to do it instead, but who wants another one of those?

And then, because you've also basically surrendered direct control over when the car is locked and when it isn't, it does all kinds of daft things.

I tend to reverse park close to a wall on my driveway, due to a shortage of space. And when I know that the car I've just parked is locked, I can squeeze across behind it without triggering the blasted foot-kick-thing automatic boot-opening sensor (we will call that dander-elevating public enemy number two, by the way). But when the car in question unlocks itself again before I've squeezed behind it and the boot automatically opens, I either get pinned to the wall I've parked up against or the boot just whacks itself on the brickwork like some dumb, half-loosed catapult.

I've known hybrid cars with PKE systems stolen because they were inadvertently left running and open when the driver believed they had shut down and automatically locked.

And then you get into the modern business of tech-enabled car theft, which is of course entirely enabled by PKE.

All along, the key has worked just fine. It wasn't broken; once teamed, admittedly, with a modern alarm and immobiliser system, it didn't need fixing. And guess what? It still doesn't.

Enduring Legacy

After 36 years, Subaru Legacy production is about to end. **STEPHEN DOBIE** reflects on the lineage's diverse appeal

PHOTOGRAPHY JACK HARRISON

Performance, practicality, ride and handling balance: Legacy GT-B nails them all

Outback raised estate is less sporty than its progenitor but the shared DNA is apparent

The turbulence of this transforming new car market has already claimed some notable victims. Who would have imagined a world without Mondeos and Fiestas just a handful of years ago? And true car obsessives will soon have another name to mournfully raise a glass to, because Subaru Legacy production will end this spring.

Okay, its loss won't garner the same school-run or L-plate anecdotes as those famous Fords, but the Legacy is a car of importance to people like us. For those of a certain generation, it was a punchy purchase for a modest bunch of credits on Gran Turismo; for others, it's the machine that Colin McRae drove to his first World Rally Championship win back in 1993. While its legend may pale beside the Impreza's, its legacy (yes, yes...) is no less impressive.

It's a heck of a lot cheaper to buy used, too. As Impreza prices rise seemingly by the minute, the most celebrated 22B versions nudging quarter of a million, Legacys continue to sell for peanuts.

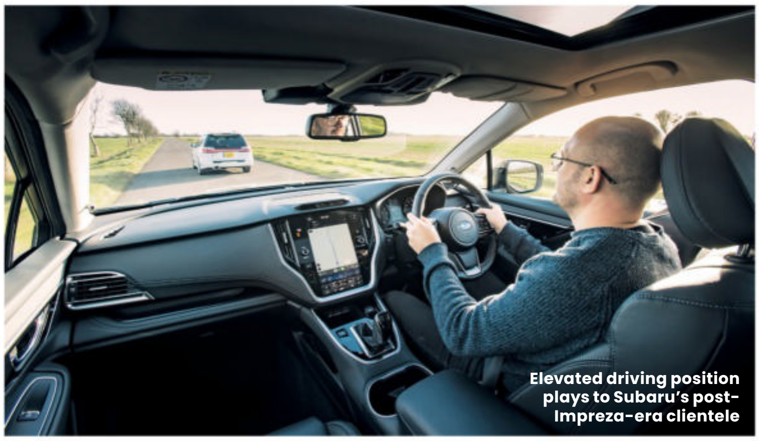
The square plates signify the origin of the 1999 GT-B we have here as the Japanese domestic market (JDM), and it represents one of the most potent iterations in the Legacy's 36-year life, yet it can be easily bought for less than £5000 in decent nick. Well, once you've found one for sale...

Alongside it is the survivor, the amalgamation of Legacy DNA that you can still buy showroom-fresh in Britain. Indeed, 752 people did just that in 2024, making the Outback Subaru's best-seller amid successful year-on-year stats. Launched in 1995 as a raised and cladded variant of the Legacy estate, the Outback soon became a model all of its own – one with a life still ahead of it.

Once Subaru wound down its WRC programme and stopped selling asbo Imprezas, its UK audience returned to being a loyal, rural lot, and thus the sole spec in which you can buy the current Outback is targeted perfectly at them – so far away from the spec of the GT-B.

Indeed, the two turbochargers of this pairing aren't shared out evenly. While the 200,000-mile Legacy you see here puts 276bhp through Subaru's famed symmetrical all-wheel drive system via a taut five-speed manual gearbox, its modern-day relative makes do with 167 naturally aspirated horses and a continuously variable transmission. No car has managed to extract thrills from one of those, but then the jumped-up suspension and rugged roof rails suggest the Outback treads a wholly different path to the gnarlier GT-B and its bonnet scoop.

"Space, pace and a handsome face" was Subaru's blueprint for the Legacy back in 1989, and its most luxurious car to date was designed ▸



Elevated driving position plays to Subaru's post-Impreza-era clientele

You wouldn't have a Scooby about the GT-B's rally roots from this angle

“The work of its standard Bilstein dampers borders on the ethereal”

McRAE’S BIG SPLASH

Colin McRae and Subarus go together like burger and chips, yet it wasn’t an Impreza bonnet from which the Scot first sprayed a bottle of champagne. His inaugural WRC win arrived alongside Derek Ringer as the pair took a Legacy RS saloon to Rally New Zealand victory in August 1993.

“It wasn’t difficult,” said McRae at the time, “once you understand you can’t drive this rally sideways. I haven’t been any less attacking, just staying on the line and keeping the car straight.”

◂ primarily for the US market, where it and the Outback have sold well ever since, consistently surfing the crest of owner-satisfaction surveys.

It wasn’t long before the enthusiasts within the company got their hands on it, though, and a seemingly infinite number of multi-suffixed specials fill racing games and online resources in a befuddling array of configurations.

This GT-B is a prime example to highlight its performance prowess, although its besotted owner, Daren Patient, encourages prudence before I clamber into the enveloping sports seat, keen to fulfil an ambition held since I bought one of these in Mustard Mica via a PlayStation pad.

“It doesn’t corner like an Impreza,” he warns, reminding me of the Legacy’s classier intent. He needn’t have worried. Nostalgia fizzes through me the moment I turn the key and the wubbah-wubbah of its idling 2.0-litre boxer permeates the chilled morning air like the twin rotors of an approaching Chinook.

The engine is already warmed from photography runs and the long straight out of our glamorous lay-by is a perfect opportunity to experience late-’90s twin-turbo delivery, a world before the hot-vee and mild-hybrid solutions that help solve turbo lag today.

Indeed, the power only truly hits at around 4000rpm, once both turbos boost in unison, when acceleration builds and soars, rather than hitting like a sledgehammer.

Once into its stride, the GT-B feels unstoppable, and you end up wishing for more than its five gears, as if the speed would just keep climbing with the comically repeated upshifts of a movie car chase. Once a corner arrives, its brakes inspire confidence, and its dinky but well-spaced pedal box allows you to blip downshifts easily.

Yet this laid-back Legacy never demands such intricacies from its driver. The significance of its ‘B’ affix can’t be underplayed, the work of its standard Bilsteins bordering on the ethereal. I’ve driven very few cars that balance ride comfort and handling nous to this degree. It resists roll with even ambitious cornering speeds and its responses are endlessly faithful, all without trading composure over the worst of a British back road. And what’s truly extraordinary is that this car runs on its original dampers, an engine rebuild being the only major mechanical blemish in its long life.

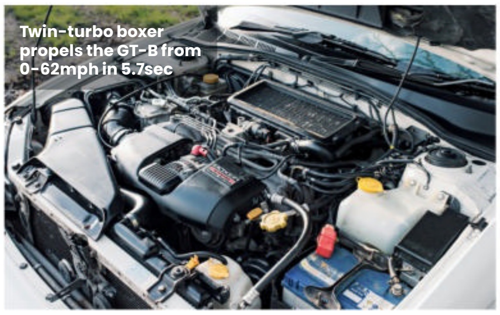
While it never truly entertains like a hot Impreza, it’s a precise thing whose vast all-weather capability draws you in. I’m not sure that a modern Volkswagen Golf R Estate, with higher peak power and a quarter-century’s worth of tech development at its disposal, would pull out much of a gap ahead.

The interior immediately ages the experience – of course it does – but exemplary refinement and rock-star flourishes like its frameless doors would delight every time you drove it.

After that, the modern Outback can only feel like what it is: a crossover. Subaru reckons its

Atmospheric flat four puts out over 100bhp less than the Legacy's

Our Subarus' differing remits are signalled by one car's roof rails…


Twin-turbo boxer propels the GT-B from 0-62mph in 5.7sec

…and the other car's bonnet air scoop

BAG A BARGAIN

As Impreza values climb, the larger Legacy looks like a steal. With UK sales having ended over a decade ago, most classifieds are listed below the £5000 mark – regardless of power output or intent.

Performance examples of the Mk2 and Mk3 Legacys (early 1990s to mid-2000s) will be JDM imports; the Mk4 arrived in 2003, bringing Britain its own quick versions, but you will still find lots of JDM offshoots there, most notably the Tuned by STi edition.

Naturally you will need to be mindful of everything, especially rust. The engine of our GT-B test car has been rebuilt, which is typically needed around the 100,000-mile mark and at sizeable expense, so check to see if it's been done or looks pending.

An immaculately kept Mk4 GT-B or Mk4 STi might command five figures. Otherwise, the Legacy is a car that sits temptingly close to 'take a punt' territory.

1995 progenitor began the trend ("the driving choice of everyone from the landed gentry to outdoors families", reads the bumf), but it's fair to say you're unlikely to cross-shop this with many rivals nowadays. You surely buy a Subaru if you want a Subaru, and thankfully at least two people every day still crave the single-minded spec of this latest Outback.

Curiously, they're getting the car with more heft to its steering, drama to its damping and noise in its cabin of this pair. Which isn't to say that it's especially rough or boisterous, merely that it proves how thoroughly engineered and wide in its remit that GT-B truly was.

From the off, the Outback is much less sporting, pitching and rolling its way through corners and demanding a concerted effort to get up to speed, its lack of turbos evident and its CVT droning away under big throttle loads.

But once you've adapted to its power delivery, I can see this being a thoroughly easy thing to live with. It occupies a pleasing precipice between traditional engineering and new technology, blending in mandatory driver assistance systems as well as we can expect (Subaru launched its Eyesight technology suite more than a decade ago, long before the rulebooks demanded this stuff), while its big infotainment touchscreen is very neatly integrated. Daren is especially satisfied by the absence of the tacked-on-tablet aesthetic that many modern dashboards possess.

Starting at £37,995, it also feels good value in the area Subarus have always majored: perceived engineering, rather than the perceived quality its German foes have traditionally done so well. I wouldn't be surprised if this Outback is still going strong a few decades from now. It's unabashed about its own USP, and in a market that can struggle for true diversity in light of vast platform- and powertrain-sharing, here's a brand that proudly sells something rarer-groove.

These two make a merry pair – one that really proves the flexibility of this model lineage. Even if they no longer share a name, there's a common integrity that ties them together. While I would be reluctant to recommend the current Outback to many folks outside of its core customer set, it's a charmer, and the bones of it are admirable. With more focused damping, extra power and a gratifying gearbox, it would properly satisfy its driver. All the elements that elevate its GT-B ancestor for a fraction of the price, essentially.

Raise a glass to the Legacy – and buy one before everyone else realises what they're missing. 🅰

	1999 SUBARU LEGACY GT-B	**2025 SUBARU OUTBACK 2.5i FIELD**
Price	£3000-£10,000 (used)	£37,995 (new)
Engine	4 cyls horizontally opposed, 1994cc, twin-turbo, petrol	4 cyls horizontally opposed, 2498cc, petrol
Power	276bhp at 6500rpm	167bhp at 5000-5800rpm
Torque	248lb ft at 5000rpm	186lb ft at 3800rpm
Gearbox	5-spd manual, 4WD	CVT, 4WD
Kerb weight	1500kg	1641kg
0-62mph	5.7sec	10.2sec
Top speed	169mph	120mph
Economy	25.0mpg (est)	32.8mpg
CO$_2$	A lot	193g/km
Rivals	Audi S4, Mitsubishi Galant VR-4	Citroën C5 X, Skoda Octavia

“We’ve completely changed the way we create cars”

Mercedes has over 130 years of car-making heritage, but tech chief Markus Schäfer says new technology is transforming everything. He tells **JAMES ATTWOOD** how

EQXX
VISION EQXX

“I have one of the most interesting jobs in the industry,” says Markus Schäfer with a smile, and even though he adds he’s “sometimes joking”, there’s absolute truth to his comment.

His brief as chief technology officer of Mercedes-Benz is vast: effectively, he’s responsible for overseeing the research and development of every car that carries the three-pointed star. “That ranges from Formula 1 responsibilities with [Mercedes F1 power unit specialist] High Performance Powertrains to overseeing the entire research and development side of Mercedes-Benz Cars, turning ideas into real products of the future,” he says. “That’s a unique combination.”

And that isn’t even Schäfer’s only job. He sits on the Mercedes-Benz Group board and is also responsible for procurement. “I’m in charge of purchasing around 40 to 50 billion components, depending on the year, that go into cars,” he says. “It’s busy these days.”

Those would be daunting briefs in any era, let alone one in which Mercedes offers one of the largest and most diverse line-ups in the industry in both model types and powertrains. And on top of that there is the swirling uncertainty of electrification and shifting sands of legislation. Schäfer admits it is “very, very challenging”.

He adds: “We don’t have a crystal ball, but we’re trying to anticipate what’s happening in the world and react accordingly when developing technology for this iconic brand. But what makes me confident is that we have a unique combination of different entities that no other company has.

“We have Formula 1 and motorsports. We have AMG, we have Maybach and we have Mercedes-Benz. And we have substantial funds to invest in research. That gives me the freedom to work with a great team to develop cars that do more than move you from A to B.”

To use such breadth as an advantage, though, it has to be harnessed. Espousing technology transfer is easily done, but actually taking knowledge gleaned from building hybrid F1 powertrains in Brixworth, UK, and applying it to EVs being developed in Stuttgart isn’t easy. So how does Schäfer do it?

“It sounds a bit cheesy, but I’m a great believer in creating a learning organisation,” he says. “I’ve spent more than 30 years in this business as an engineer, mostly in this company, and I’ve learned you need to create a network of people that work extremely close together: no silos, no hierarchy. What we’re doing is bringing all these global people – from China, Europe, the US, the UK – together to work as one team.

“You have to learn from each other and share ideas. With the F1 team, we’re learning a lot because their turnaround time is measured in hours. They don’t have time after a crash if they need to change the chassis or figure out an engine problem. That’s how they work. So we can learn speed: chasing milliseconds, continuous improvement, getting better every race.”

Schäfer cites the Mercedes EQXX, the ultra-efficient road-legal electric hypermiler built to prove that a battery-powered car could top 1000km (620 miles) on a single charge, as one example of that collaboration: “Its development was led by the way the F1 team pushes the limits. It’s way more than headlines, technology transfer – and it also works the other way round.”

To illustrate that point, Schäfer says Mercedes-Benz Cars has aided the F1 team through “foundational and fundamental research” in areas such as “the basics of processes such as combustion”. He adds: “Another area is batteries. In 2026, half an F1 powertrain will be electric, and the research Mercedes has done in batteries will help the F1 team.”

The acknowledgement that Mercedes is still refining its combustion engines while also developing a whole new generation of fast-evolving electric powertrains points to the massive challenge that car firms currently face. And as much as Schäfer highlights how much Mercedes invests in R&D, it ultimately still has finite resources.

“These days, the future seems even more uncertain because of the number of fields you’re playing in on the mechanical and electromechanical side, on software and electronics,” he says. “And our playing field is the world: we’re a global company, so it’s China, it’s Europe, it’s the US – and customer preferences and technology are not the same everywhere.”

That can be seen in China’s love of extended-wheelbase saloons, and also screens. “They want bells and whistles on the digital side,” says Schäfer. “No buttons, only screens – give it to me. Conservative S-Class customers in Europe think differently.”

That means “the differences between customers between regions are not converging: they’re getting bigger. So we have to develop ▸

Mercedes has learned from how its F1 team works – and vice versa

◂ different solutions. That doesn't help efficiency, but successful products have to be tailored to the customer."

In recent years, of course, there has often been a divide between the cars customers want and the cars legislators want them to want. So flexibility is vital, as seen by Mercedes' decision to pivot and offer the planned EV-only next-gen CLA with mild-hybrid powertrains as well.

"We're moving from a mechanical world of combustion engines to a world which is electric, digital and autonomous," says Schäfer. "It's happening at different speeds and being driven by regulations and geopolitics. We wish for stable regulations but this is not something we have. So the answer is flexibility.

"The ultimate proof is the customer's choice: in the end, the customer decides what to buy. So we have to tailor the right product for the right customers, and if we show the benefit of new technology, the customer will buy it. The end goal is clear for us: it's the electric car, because it's the most efficient way of transforming energy into movement, and a great tool for carbon reduction.

"But you don't have to force the customer: you have to convince the customer this is a great choice, because it's a desirable car, it's great aesthetics, it's emotional and there's a business case. The CLA can do 12kWh/100km [5.1mpkWh] so it can be a great economical benefit."

Schäfer's Mercedes-Benz career began in 1990, as a trainee within the firm's international management programme

The CLA's efficiency means that it will offer more than 400 miles of range as an EV, which, notes Schäfer, is "a huge step for an entry-level car". That efficiency has been hard-won: "Three years ago, I established an efficiency department that does nothing but drill into the last bits and bytes that impact the efficiency of a car.

"We've looked at wind resistance, aerodynamics, the rolling resistance of tyres and every moving part. We looked at heating and cooling, and at the electric motor. That's driven us to develop our own motors, because we thought we can do better. So instead of having one gear, let's have two gears to decouple in a four-wheel-drive car, so if you don't need one motor, it's intelligently switched off."

The CLA will be the first car on Mercedes' new MMA platform, created for compact cars. The firm is also developing a new platform for medium-sized EVs and a bespoke performance architecture for future AMG models. But in an era when software is increasingly important, what exactly is a car platform these days?

"In the era of EVs and autonomous cars, we have to rethink platforms and architectures because we've completely changed the way we create cars. In the old days, you'd start with a shell. Now you start from your operating system.

"You start with software and electronics. You design the layout of your ECUs and how data is distributed around the car, which depends on the sensor set and actuators you have. This is the starting point: zone architecture, domain architecture, how many gigabits you want to transfer, how many teraflops the car needs to operate. Then how many cameras, radars and light pixels you need.

"Our end goal is the electric car, a great tool for carbon reduction"

Mercedes-Benz
Driving Events

Using the same software architecture for all Mercs is a "game-changer"

Hypermiling EQXX is an EV tech test bed that uses key lessons from F1

"We've made it modular so we have one software architecture, MB.OS, which we'll see first with the MMA cars. It will be in every Mercedes car, van and AMG. We'll scale it over two, three million cars.

"The second element of the platform is the powertrain: modular drivetrains, modular batteries, modular e-motors. And then, later on, you put a shell around it, a nice, beautiful aesthetic shell designed by [Mercedes design chief] Gorden Wagener. But that's the last part."

Schäfer describes the shift of every future model to a single operating system as "a game-changer", not least in how it has changed development. In the past, Mercedes would buy control units and chips from suppliers and then "put them together in a spaghetti diagram". But now "we are the architects" defining the entire layout.

In turn, that means Mercedes can more rapidly achieve "very, very big scale" with reduced complexity and – a bonus for the guy in charge of procurement – with "better supply chain resilience".

It's a big step, though, and rivals such as the Volkswagen Group and Volvo have struggled with making the transition to software-defined vehicles. Schäfer says that success for Mercedes will come back to culture: "We have software and hardware people sitting next to each other, because a car is a super-integrated product.

DEFINING ELECTRIC CLASS
Mercedes-Benz Driving Events

Schäfer knows buyers need to be convinced that EVs are desirable

Next CLA – now mild hybrid as well as EV – uses new MMA platform

Schäfer is adamant the brand's foundations "should not change"

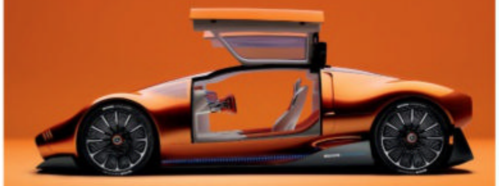
We've brought in lots of people from the software industry who have different methods of working, and with our culture of working together, we have absolute respect in implementing that."

There's another aspect to the challenge as well: while Mercedes is breaking in to new technology, it still has more than 130 years of heritage to live up to. This is the firm, after all, that pioneered the combustion engine.

"There's a foundation this brand is carried on that should not change," says Schäfer. "There's fundamental pillars, trust in the brand. A Mercedes is always known for quality.

"Safety is a key pillar for us, which will never change, and so is desirability. It's the aesthetics, beautiful proportions, details, craftsmanship. And it's always been about technology. We'll never give up the core elements that created one of the most valuable brands in the world." A

UK FIRM POWERING AMG'S FUTURE EVs



Electrification presents its own challenges for Mercedes-AMG, which like other performance arms has to work out how to make EVs that are both fast and fun.

Schäfer says that the brief for AMG has been to "make an electric road car that blows your mind" and is "a really authentic AMG, which means extremely sporty performance at a competitive level".

The firm has already revealed one key aspect of it: the axial-flux motor developed by British firm Yasa (now owned by Mercedes). Used on the dual-motor Mercedes Vision One-Eleven concept (above), it offers "among the highest power density per weight the world has seen. It's a very, very special piece of technology."

And Schäfer promises that will be just one element of a car that "is so, so special. You will feel it and you will see it in numbers, but it will also be emotional. I promise you: you will be impressed when you drive this car. We know making a great, authentic sports car is a great challenge, but we are up to it."

Dish the dirt

Why on earth is this off-road buggy a Lexus? **JAMES ATTWOOD** explains

The Lexus H_2 ROV concept is, at first glance, perhaps the most spurious, frivolous vehicle the firm has ever produced. It's a lightweight off-road buggy and that's an odd fit for a brand that trades on a Japanese vision of premium luxury. It might be fantastic fun but it doesn't feel like a bold vision of the future in the way you would expect of a concept.

But, as Lexus chief engineer Takeaki Kato notes, premium car buyers still want to have fun. "Lexus road cars are more about luxury, but people who own them still like to play," he says. "And there are Lexus owners, particularly in the US, who also have an off-road buggy to play with. So why can't they have a Lexus for that as well?"

Besides, the creative process that led to the ROV (it stands for recreational off-highway vehicle) is of real significance for how Lexus and parent firm Toyota are developing future technology – in particular, hydrogen. The ROV uses an H_2 combustion engine, with the idea that it could offer emission-free motoring – at the tailpipe, at least. More broadly, it's part of Toyota's quest to prove hydrogen can work in a range of use cases where electric power has drawbacks. Granted, this might depend on your views on issues such as how 'clean' hydrogen power really is, its efficiency relative to electric and more. Right now, though, let's check out this buggy.

The first thing to know about the H_2 ROV is that it isn't really a Lexus. Its basis is a Yamaha YXZ1000R and the project is the result of a deep collaboration between the two Japanese firms. Yamaha brought its vast experience of producing lightweight off-roaders, with Lexus adding hydrogen combustion technology and access to more sustainable materials.

The biggest change is to the YXZ1000R's 998cc direct-injection inline three-cylinder engine. The original runs on petrol, but for the Lexus the Yamaha unit has been converted to run on compressed hydrogen fuel, using a direct-injection system taken from the H_2-powered GR Yaris concept. "It was hard work," says Kato. "We had to change all the head areas and the injector to ensure it was suitable."

The H_2 engine has a max output of 80bhp, compared with 112bhp for the original, reflecting that it's still a work in progress and the focus has been on developing the technology, not maximising performance. It retains a powertrain that can be switched between 2WD and 4WD, and a five-speed sequential gearbox.

Top speed is 62mph – 31mph down on the original but still plenty, given this is an off-road buggy

LEXUS H_2 ROV
Engine 3 cyls in line, 998cc, hydrogen
Power 80bhp
Torque 65lb ft
Gearbox 5-spd manual, 4WD
Kerb weight 760kg
Top speed 62mph
Rivals Can-Am Maverick, Polaris RZR XP1000

Hydrogen power is the main differentiator between this and a Yamaha YXZ1000R

designed for dirt tracks. That said, you won't take it on particularly long dirt trails because its hydrogen fuel tank (from the Toyota Mirai) gives it a range of around 11 miles.

But the short range and relatively low-speed use case are what made the project appeal to Lexus. "The H_2 GR Yaris race car is more about high engine performance, whereas this is more like regular use," says Kato. "We can use this to check performance in the 1000-2000rpm range and aspects like usability."

The revamped powertrain ups the weight from 690kg to 760kg, while tread has been increased by 100mm at the front and rear (to 1470mm and 1520mm respectively), to improve rollover performance on bumps and ride comfort. This is a premium Lexus, remember.

Ground clearance remains 330mm. The KYB shock absorbers have been retuned both to account for the extra weight and to use biodegradable oil that can be recycled and will minimise environmental damage should it leak on a trail.

That's an example of why the ROV isn't just a showcase for the firm's hydrogen combustion powertrain: the reworked body features a raft of materials designed to reduce the environmental impact of its manufacturing and use.

The windscreen is made from bio-based polycarbonate and is claimed to use 80% less CO_2 in production than a standard one. The bumper and bonnet are made from material recycled from scrapped cars and blended with a bio-based resin, while plant-based biodegradable plastics are used for the fixture clips. The seatbacks use recycled thermoplastic polyester and the body is covered in a film wrap – 9kg lighter than painting it and easier to repair when scratched.

And it will get scratched, because the ROV is intended for off-road use and, frankly, there aren't many places it can't go. A short passenger ride on the Dreux circuit's motocross course showed as much, with the suspension giving it a physics-defying ability to remain planted to the ground even on the steepest of yumps and bumps, while also allowing for fast, stable cornering on loose, rocky gravel.

It's fun, then. But it's also a sign of Toyota's approach to development, working with partners to broaden its expertise. "Yamaha doesn't just work with us on this: it's helped on the race car," says Kato. "We learn from each other. We have no idea if we could put this project into production or not, but technology by technology, it will feed back into production models."

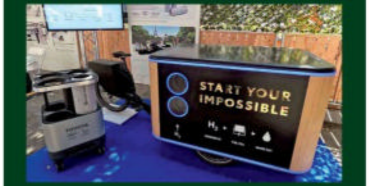
TOYOTA'S HY-SOCIETY

Toyota's efforts to develop hydrogen technology involve a wide range of products and partnerships, as these show.

BUSES AND COACHES
Since 2019, Toyota has supplied CaetanoBus with fuel cell components for the e.City Gold FCEV bus, which has a range of around 250 miles. The firm has also worked with GCK to convert diesel coaches to FCEV.

Coca-Cola
Chaudfontaine
Coca-Cola

TRUCKS
Every December, Coca-Cola's fleet of big red trucks is a sign that the holidays are coming. And in future, they could be powered by hydrogen: Toyota and Air Liquide have developed an FCEV truck that has been used by the drink firm's French arm.



ICE CREAM DELIVERY BIKES
Yes, it's a cargo e-bike with a freezer to keep your Cornetto cold – and it's powered by a portable hydrogen cartridge. Developed by Toyota and in prototype stage, each 4.7-litre tank contains 1.8kWh of energy.

That single, central tailpipe emits no CO_2; dampers use biodegradable oil

Range is 11 miles but your skeletal structure might break before then anyway

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LIVING WITH A...

Where our long-term test cars have been and what they've done

"The car proved surprisingly good fun in corners"

FINAL REPORT **MILEAGE 10,135**

VAUXHALL CORSA

Our time with this mild hybrid is up - and we learned a way to save £2k

WHY WE RAN IT To find out if this supermini still deserves to be a staple of British roads

The Corsa name turns 43 years old in 2025, having first graced the mainland European version of the boxy hatch that we Brits are more likely to know as the Nova in 1982.

The first UK Corsa – the round, cuddly hatch that pretty much defines the 'blobject' school of design that became so prevalent throughout the 1990s – hit our potholed roads in 1993 and few other nameplates are now quite so ingrained in our mental image of the British road scene.

That said, in practice most people simply look straight through the Corsa. Much like a first-generation Nissan Qashqai or, perhaps more appropriately, a Ford Fiesta, it's just… there, simply a part of the traffic jam making your Monday morning worse or occupying the last parking space on your street, worthy of no further thought.

The aforementioned Ford was always the yin to the Corsa's yang, and a year and a half into the post-Fiesta world, the Vauxhall silently soldiers on, unappreciated by most. It popped up on the top 10 best-seller's list a couple of times during last year but failed to take even a step towards the heights it hit in 2023, when the Corsa was the third-most-sold new car in the country.

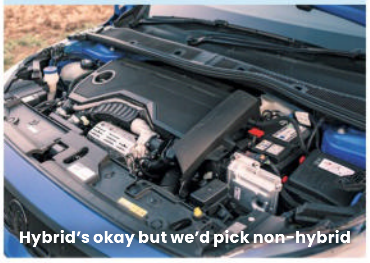
So are buyers missing out on something special by discounting the Corsa? Based on my experience, I'll admit that the Corsa hasn't done a huge amount to enamour me over the past few months, but it's done little to make me actively dislike it either.

Let's start with one important thing I liked: the way it drove on the open road. The 134bhp hybrid set-up in my car was all you could ever need in the real world, with the 1.2-litre turbo petrol three-cylinder providing more than enough power all through the rev range.

With its 0-62mph time on the right side of nine seconds, I never had to worry about picking up enough speed to match the flow of a fast-moving motorway, and the in-gear acceleration was better than I had initially expected. Overtaking was a decidedly straightforward experience: you'd simply mash your foot to the floor to kick it down a gear or two and you'd slide easily past the truck/tractor/Honda Jazz doing 35mph in a national speed limit zone for no conceivable reason. It's a shame, then, that this powertrain has just been removed

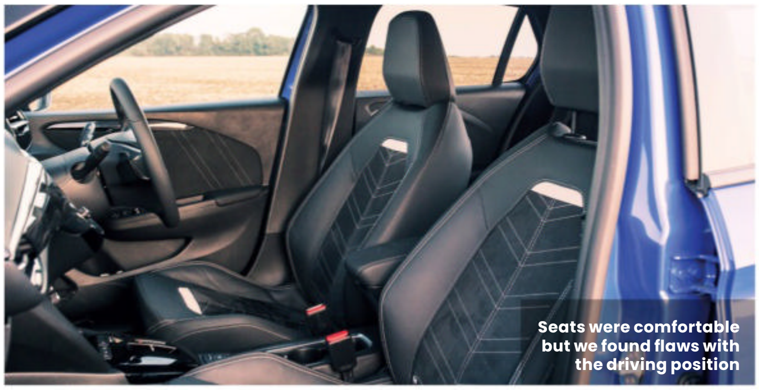
SECOND OPINION

I enjoyed the Corsa. It's easily recommendable. But I couldn't quite get comfortable over long distances with it, and when I drove the hybrid and base models back to back, the extra dynamism and lightness of the non-electrified car won out, particularly as it seemed no less frugal. **MP**



Hybrid's okay but we'd pick non-hybrid

Real-world pace was sufficient and a 485-mile range possible


Seats were comfortable but we found flaws with the driving position

Useful-sized boot was the payback for modest rear accommodation

from sale, leaving only the slightly gutless 99bhp hybrid and non-hybrid petrol engines on sale.

The car proved surprisingly good fun in corners. Body roll was well contained and lateral grip plentiful, which made it feel stable enough for me to throw it about when I took the long way home. It didn't prompt me to go for a drive just for the sake of it, but neither did I constantly wish I was driving something else whenever I found myself on an entertainingly winding road.

The Corsa also proved a capable motorway cruiser – something people seem to think a small car is incapable of being. Engine noise and road noise were wonderfully quiet compared with other superminis, and the seats were superbly comfortable. That was great because, with a 45-litre fuel tank, it was more than happy to consistently travel well over 400 miles once brimmed. Economy was impressive overall, typically hovering just under 50mpg, albeit much less than the official combined 60.1mpg.

It wasn't all sunshine and roses, though. As comfortable as the seats were, the driving position itself was about as unergonomic as it gets. A few colleagues reckon it's to do with the car's platform being designed primarily for the i-Cockpit layout used by Stellantis stablemate Peugeot. It certainly felt that way, with the cheap-looking instrument screen always seeming to be slightly obscured. I'm a pretty normally proportioned person, but no matter what I did – adjusted the column, changed the seat distance, sat lower – there was always something off that no amount of fiddling could fix.

The tiny windscreen aperture had a seemingly shallow rake, which made it feel very far away, and the rear-view mirror appeared to be about twice as large as it ought to be, blocking what little you could already see forward. A black headlining and dark, glossy plastics seemed to suck in all of the light, making the interior a dim place to be. Space was limited too: five-up drives in the Corsa were enjoyed by none. The boot was as big as you could hope for, mind you.

My main problem with the Corsa hybrid is simple: the existence of the non-hybrid. I ran one in lowlier GS trim for a while to see how it compared and made some interesting discoveries. Not only did it fix the hybrid's appallingly crashy ride, but it was just as economical overall. In fact, it was a mighty 0.1mpg more efficient than the hybrid. And, in baggy but liveable manual guise, it is £2k cheaper.

Are you missing anything special by not being more aware of the Corsa? Not really, but it's a perfectly capable car nonetheless.

JACK HARRISON

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jack.harrison@haymarket.com

TEST DATA

VAUXHALL CORSA 1.2 TURBO HYBRID 136PS ULTIMATE

MILEAGE

At start 2858
At end 10,135

PRICES

List price new £29,030
List price now £29,255
Price as tested £29,630

OPTIONS

Voltaic Blue Paint £600

ECONOMY AND RANGE

Claimed economy 60.1mpg
Fuel tank 45 litres
Test average 49.0mpg
Test best 50.2mpg
Test worst 47.8mpg
Real-world range 485 miles

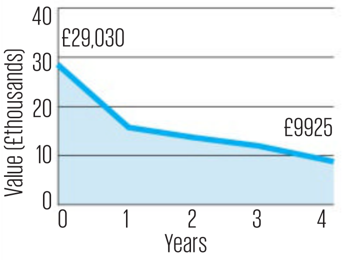
TECH HIGHLIGHTS

0-62mph 8.6sec
Top speed 133mph
Engine 3 cyls in line, 1199cc, turbo, petrol, plus electric motor
Max power 134bhp
Max torque 170lb ft
Gearbox 6-spd dual-clutch automatic, FWD
Boot 309 litres
Wheels 17in, alloy
Tyres 205/45 R17
Kerb weight 1192kg

SERVICE AND RUNNING COSTS

Contract hire rate na (1.2 Turbo Hybrid 100PS Ultimate £268 pcm)
CO_2 106g/km
Service costs None
Other costs None
Fuel costs £910.16
Running costs including fuel £910.16
Cost per mile 13 pence
Faults Mysterious crackling after long journey, infotainment freezing

DEPRECIATION



PREVIOUS REPORTS

2 Oct 2024, 9 Oct, 16 Oct, 30 Oct, 13 Nov, 27 Nov, 31 Dec, 15 Jan 2025, 22 Jan, 29 Jan

LOVE IT

MEASURED DESIGN
Its 'Vizor' front end looks sharp, but not too sharp – it fits in anywhere with ease.

CLASSY INFOTAINMENT
The Ultimate trim's bespoke infotainment system is worlds apart from the base-spec one and feels decidedly premium.

IT'S NOT AN SUV
It's nice to see that there's life left in the petrol supermini. A crossover wouldn't handle as well as our Corsa did.

LOATHE IT

CRASH, BANG, WALLOP
I'm unable to think of a single non-performance car with a secondary ride that's even half as bad as this.

RELEASE THE BRAKES
The regenerative braking is maddening around town, being far too strong and non-adjustable.

LEXUS RX

We've got a warm feeling about our Lexus, despite Britain's best efforts

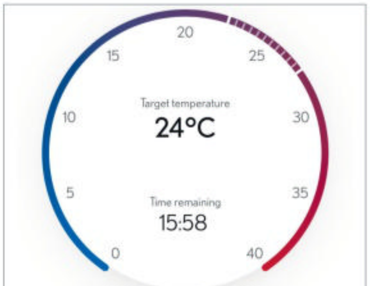
MILEAGE 2813
WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT To find out if the original hybrid luxury SUV is still the best

I'm not generally a great believer in automotive smartphone apps, as they tend to be over-complicated and not hugely useful, but the recent cold snap tempted me to download Lexus Link+ to try out its climate settings.

Pleasingly, it's logical and simple to use, offering general data such as fuel and battery levels, range, any warnings from the car and the status of the doors, windows and boot, plus a neat Hybrid Coaching section to help you get the best from the hybrid drivetrain. Apparently I have 'room for improvement' – no surprise there.

But the main event is the remote control for the climate. You can set any temperature from 18-29deg C and ask it to start on demand, and it will give you a countdown to when it's expected to reach your chosen level. Alternatively, you can tell it to start automatically at a set time, either as a one-off use or on repeat. You can even programme it to follow different schedules on weekdays and at the weekend.

My wife wasn't best pleased when I enjoyed a morning cuppa while she went out to chip the ice from her frozen Mini and saw that the RX's windows were all clear, and inside it looked cosy and inviting.



Target temperature
24°C

Time remaining
15:58

Clements needs only to look at his phone to know how warm his car is

In truth, the heating system as a whole is worthy of mention, too. Since setting it to my comfy level (21deg C) shortly after collecting the car, I've hardly had to touch the controls. Despite it being very large inside, the RX heats up remarkably quickly, and the heated/ventilated seats and heated steering wheel are both set to 'auto', which means that they turn themselves on and off with a near-telepathic intuition.

LOVE IT

ACCESS ALL AREAS
I love that the huge central storage bin opens both sides via a rather clever hinge. Pass the sweets? Get them yourself!

LOATHE IT

LEFT FULL RUDDER
Don't expect to manoeuvre like an autotester: the RX's turning circle is a boat-like 20ft.

AUTO
OFF
AUTO
21
FRONT
VOL

Twisters and buttons for climate functions make all the difference

I also love that the only two settings I do vary regularly – turning on the heated rear screen/heated mirrors and windscreen demist – are both available via buttons, so I don't have to wade through touchscreen menus.

This always feels like a car that has been designed with the driver's comfort and convenience in mind.

And you can't talk about comfort without mentioning the phenomenal seats, which are supportive and cosseting in equal measure. There has been some complaint from my (clearly very spoiled) daughter that the seats in the rear aren't heated as well, and I was surprised to discover that to get them, you have to upgrade to the £6000-pricier Takumi trim level.

You do have to search quite hard to find a gap in the spec sheet of this F Sport Design car, though.

The dipped-beam headlights could be a bit better, but other than that it's the consummate winter car: grippy, safe and secure-feeling, even if you do sense its considerable weight when hitting an icy patch.

The outside world is near-silenced, but the doors do require a good slam to shut properly, and even after a few months my wife continues to complain about the needless complexity of the electric door buttons, bemoaning: "What's wrong with a proper door handle?"

I'm used to them now, but for some reason I keep forgetting to lock the car when I've been out for a short trip. Fortunately, that's another useful element of the Lexus Link+ app: it sends me a notification to let me know if there's a window or door open or a door unlocked, and I can then lock it from my phone. A comforting safety net for if I ever have to rush for a plane or train.
ALASTAIR CLEMENTS

TEST DATA

LEXUS RX 450H+ F SPORT DESIGN
Price new £69,995 **Price as tested** £70,245 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Economy** 70.4mpg **Last seen** 29.1.25

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alastair.clements@haymarket.com

AUDI A3 SPORTBACK

Are diesel cars still pariahs? Depends who you ask

MILEAGE 1621
WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT To see whether a facelift has succeeded in keeping this ICE hatchback relevant

Having spent a couple of months in this diesel A3, I've had plenty of time to ponder the evolution of diesel power. Not least because its almost inevitable fate is a result of a scandal that involved former derivatives of this very engine used across the Volkswagen Group, of which Audi is part.

The drama of Dieselgate is hard to grasp 10 years on – how shocking it was and how it affected an entire industry when diesel really was in its heyday. Not to say that the world wouldn't have evolved by now regardless (bad news stories about pollution from fossil fuel-burning cars didn't just become a thing because of the scandal), but it certainly exacerbated the issue.

And yet here I am with a diesel A3, which accounts for 5% of A3 sales (the overall UK diesel market share last year was 6.3%). Audi hasn't said it will stop selling it, but with those figures it seems hard to justify.

Plus, when I asked about the future of diesel for Audi, a brand spokesman said: "Audi has just launched a new generation of diesel engines for the A5 and Q5 families, featuring a completely new mild-hybrid-plus system that further reduces CO_2 output and increases performance. But Audi has a clear roadmap for the transition to electromobility: 2026 marks the turning point in our strategy."

A rare combination of plate date and pump colour

That turning point means no non-electric Audis will be launched from next year – but that's not to say the firm won't leave ageing ICE cars on sale for a longer period, especially in markets where EVs aren't yet viable.

Without that background context, and assessing a car purely on its own merits, what would I, or newcomers to diesel, make of this smart, gas-guzzling Audi?

As I mentioned in my first report, it took a few journeys to adapt to not having instant power from the 1968cc turbo four at start-up in the way of many hybrids I've run lately. But the diesel A3 is effortless to drive and it remains satisfying to see the range slowly drop from the 500s, meaning I rarely need to go to a garage. Convenience is king and all that. I'm getting 51.4mpg, which is not far off the official 55.4mpg.

Not many people I know drive a diesel these days, but just the other week I went to see an old friend and her family in Hertfordshire and there on the drive were not one but two diesels – a Mini Countryman and a Skoda Kodiaq.

I asked why they had gone for diesels and was told: "They emit less CO_2 and need filling up less often. Not living in an urban area makes the air pollution impact less of a concern and the higher torque is good for heavier cars.

"EVs are really expensive: you would have to rack up a higher mileage than a diesel to recover the initial cost and the environmental impact of building the car. Plus there's range anxiety."

Diesel may have only a handful of remaining fans based on its market share, but those hanging on – who understand the pros and cons and recognise it suits their lifestyle – still think there's a place for it.

Like them, I'll be making the most of my diesel while I still can.

RACHEL BURGESS

LOVE IT

DISTINCT GREEN

This colour is aptly named, yet it's understated too. Straw poll result: many people like it and only two I've come across do not.

LOATHE IT

GET THE MESSAGE

I have to consent to my data being shared on the touchscreen every time I start the car. Take my data, but not my time too.

TEST DATA

AUDI A3 SPORTBACK 35 TDI S LINE S TRONIC

Price new £38,355 **Price as tested** £40,445 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Economy** 51.4mpg **Last seen** 15.1.25

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rachel.burgess@haymarket.com

What do drivers of these cars know that the rest of the population don't?

SNAPSHOTS

GENESIS G80 EV

Mileage 9383 **Last seen** 29.1.25
Back in the Electrified G80 after some weeks away, I'm immediately pleased by the refinement. I couldn't help noticing, though, how the stuff I transferred from the Mini I had been driving almost filled the boot of this much bigger car. I can't ever remember having a saloon that's so compromised in its boot space. Most cars like this make perfect airport limos. Not this one. **SC**

MG 3

Mileage 7742 **Last seen** 29.1.25
Tasked with picking up a long parcel from one of those post lockers in an unlit car park, I fumbled around trying to fold down the MG's rear seats and promptly broke them. The bench doesn't split, unlike in virtually every other new car, so I forgot and released only one of the latches while pushing, resulting in the backrests escaping the mechanism that connects them to the base. Fortunately, I could easily pop them back in. **KC**

VOLVO EX40

Mileage 1394 **Last seen** 29.1.25
I was strangely excited to see that the EX40 had a frunk, which actually isn't a given in an EV. In most situations, a 31-litre space would be considered pretty meagre, but this is the perfect size for storing the car's charging cable so it's not taking up valuable room in the back. That said, it's dwarfed by the Tesla Model Y's 117-litre frunk. **JW**

THE CAR THAT KILLED THE M3 COUPE AND NO ONE MINDED

Or if they did, the punchier and more dynamic M4 soon won them over

How does a twin-turbocharged six-cylinder BMW M4 for the price of a tidy, reasonable-miles Toyota GR Yaris sound? Well, then, step right up with your £25,000 in hand – or far less for a leggier example.

Sure, these two brilliant driver's cars are very different beasts, but with twice the number of cylinders, way more power and an extra lashing of premium appeal, Munich's muscle car could be the more logical purchase.

Launched in 2014, the M4 was effectively a continuation of the two-door M3 and joined its four-door sibling in swapping a howling atmo V8 for a creamier straight six. Displacement devotees shuddered at the loss of the mighty 4.0-litre lump that powered the previous-generation M3, but dropping down two cylinders and adding two turbos paved the way for a healthy uplift in power and, crucially, an extra 111lb ft of torque. Thus endowed, it had 406lb ft on tap and its peak power output of 425bhp arrived at 5500rpm as opposed to the 8000rpm of its 'E92' M3 Coupé forebear. The M4 could hit 60mph in just 4.1sec too – and it was an absolute slip-road supremo, capable of surging from 30-70mph a whole 3.0sec quicker than the E92 M3.

Part of the reason for the Mk1 M4's enduring appeal is that it arrived in the hazy days when BMW still offered a manual gearbox in the UK, but honestly the seven-speed dual-clutch automatic is the better wingman for the 425bhp motor. It's slick and responsive – and full-throttle paddle shifts are highly

It feels upmarket and its fab driver environment includes useful buttons

What we said then

9 JULY 2014

"This time things are a little different. There's no question that the new M4 is a more visceral, engaging car than the previous M3 was at its launch in 2007. With this generation there is genuine progress. Not only is the M4 more powerful, lighter and cleaner than the old M3, but if you took like-for-like launch examples, you'd find an M division car that is also better now than it was then."

entertaining. That said, the six-speed manual, while being a little slower, delivers the more interactive experience when hustling it down a twisty cross-country road – as you will often be inclined to do in a car this engaging and composed.

When we road tested the M4, we said: "Select the M4's angriest settings and you'll have a car that is adeptly tied down yet compliant over the worst bumps.

"The rear diff can be completely open so it doesn't push into understeer on corner entry, or it can be completely locked, which turns the car into the kind of adjustable drift machine that M cars have recently become."

With excellent balance and body control, the M4 has all the key ingredients to stir the soul, but it isn't totally free of niggles. The steering, for example, while resoundingly precise and accurate, lacks the raw feel of the Mercedes-AMG C63's.

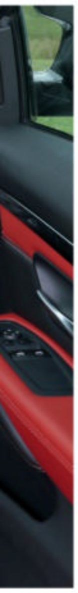
For a more visceral experience, we would go for the M4 Competition. A 35k-mile 'Comp' is around £5000 more than a comparable standard car, but with 444bhp, a revised suspension set-up and retuned differential and stability control, it's an even finer driver's car.

Its rear end is more planted and the vast reserves of torque are delivered in a more linear way to prevent the rear axle from being overwhelmed. When new, it also had the enticingly intricate 20in 'snowflake' wheels and purposeful, track-flavoured sports seats.

If that isn't enough to scratch your M itch, the hardcore, track-focused GTS model might be more to your taste. Good luck finding one, though, because only 30 right-hand-drive cars were made and it's priced at around £80,000 today.

Rounding off the first-generation M4 was the 454bhp CS, built to bridge the gap between the Competition and full-bore GTS. It's a super-refined and well-rounded sports coupé and encompasses the very best of the M4 line-up in one package – and you can get one now for less than £40,000. It handles better, sounds better, goes harder and works very well on the road, so don't rule it out if your budget can stretch further.

SAM PHILLIPS



Coupé and convertible versions are available: both do this if you want

"The CS version is a super-refined and well-rounded sports coupé – the very best of the M4 line-up"

How to get one in your garage

AN OWNER'S VIEW

OLIVER COOPER

"So far, my 2018 M4 Competition has been reliable and, at 50,000 miles, I've faced no mechanical issues. It isn't cheap to maintain, though, and you'll want to allow £1000-£1500 per year for servicing and tyres. I bought BMW's extended warranty too: it costs £1500 annually but it's an official offering and it puts my mind at ease. For the price, nothing comes close in terms of driving dynamics."

BUYER BEWARE...

■ ENGINE

Crank hub failure can dramatically affect the timing of the engine, leading to a rough idle, a loss of power and – worst case – engine failure due to incorrect valve timing. Check if it's been replaced and take the car on a long test drive to ensure it is running properly. Fitting a crank bolt capture plate is a sensible preventative measure.

The rocker cover, oil filter housing and sump gaskets can perish, so check for oil drips, and if there's a distinctive tapping sound when you start the engine from cold, it could mean that the exhaust camshaft has become misaligned - an £800-£1000 repair job.

■ TURBOS

Opinions on the lifespan of the turbos vary but they tend to show signs of wear after 50k miles.

■ BRAKES

New discs and pads cost more than £1000 for a full set. Make sure there aren't any vibrations under braking on your test drive because this could mean that the discs are warped.

■ AIR CONDITIONING

The condenser can corrode and leak, which means you won't get a nice icy blast of cool air when you switch the air-con on.

■ CONVERTIBLE ROOF

Drain tubes that disperse water from the folding roof can get blocked and leak inside the car. Check the interior for signs of water damage and ensure the roof folds and opens seamlessly. The folding mechanism is usually unharmed, though.

ALSO WORTH KNOWING

BMW also made the M4 DTM Championship edition to celebrate its win in the 2016 Deutsche Tourenwagen Masters.

It's basically an M4 GTS with a funky white paint job – and it's as rare as the car it is based on, with only a handful of DTM Edition cars sold in the UK.

The M4 was given a minor facelift for 2017, when it gained new LED headlights and brake lights, a wilder front apron for a more aggressive look, new materials, upholstery and trim options inside and an upgraded navigation system.

HOW MUCH TO SPEND

£17,000-£24,999

High-mileage, well-used early examples with plenty of owners. A few leggy Competition models on offer too, and a good mix of coupé and convertible bodystyles.

£25,000-£34,999

Mileage varies a lot so be sure to shop around. More Competitions become available here.

£35,000-£44,999

If you can stretch your budget this far, you'll easily find an immaculate Competition car with low miles, or a slightly well-used CS version.

£45,000-£54,999

Predominantly CS cars with low miles, typically one owner and in nearly new condition.

£55,000 AND ABOVE

Pristine GTS and DTM models with low miles and few past owners.

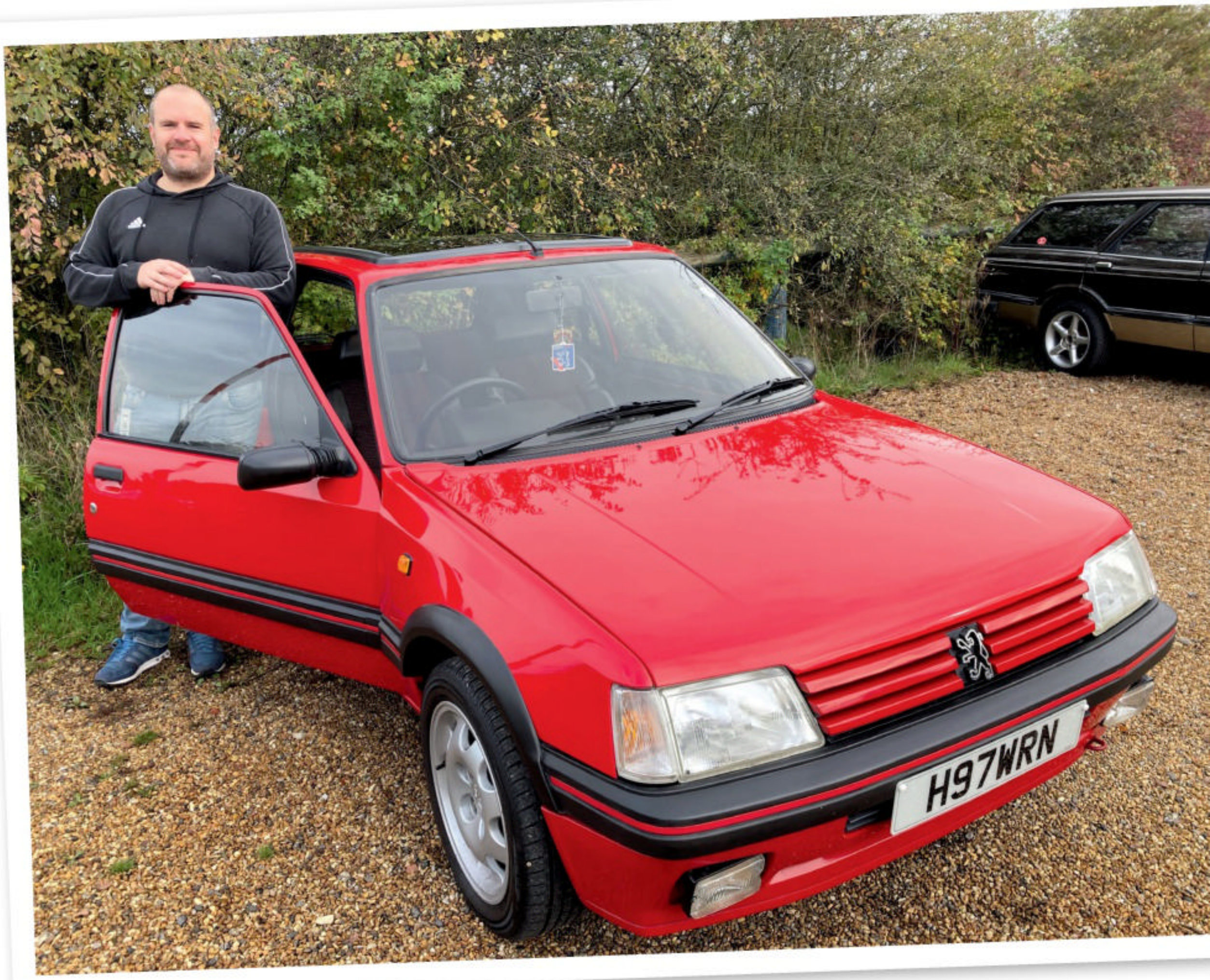
ONE WE FOUND

BMW M4 COMPETITION, 2017, 46,000 MILES, £24,250

A full service history and recent service appear to back up the seller's claims that this car has been "meticulously maintained". It looks immaculate and has handy extras, including a head-up display, Harman Kardon sound system and auto headlights.

My car & I

Lucky 13 for this charming 205 GTi



His mum had one when he was growing up (actually, it was a 1.4 Rallye), so it was inevitable that one day Steve Hooker would have his own quick Peugeot 205. It's a GTi – a 1.9, not a 1.6. Which is better is a debate for another day. For now, all that matters is that Steve loves his 1.9.

"It's not the quickest thing, but it's a lot of fun and proves that you don't have to drive fast to enjoy a sports car," he gushes. "It's all about the experience."

Like the Mk1 Volkswagen Golf GTI, the 205 GTi still looks right after all these years – even better in the red of Steve's car. Its Speedline alloys are lovely and the oblong badges reading '1.9' and 'GTi' that are set into the rear quarters and were a nice touch 40 years ago still attract knowing glances today.

Steve's car was registered in 1991, so it just missed being one of the later and less powerful 1.9s with a catalytic converter, designed to extend the model's life (the 1.6 couldn't be modified so was dropped in 1992). It has done 141,000 miles, which is a reasonable figure for a 34-year-old car when you think about it. Less easy to get your head around is that it has had 12 former owners, equivalent to a change of keeper every 2.8 years.

Our cars

It was cheap to buy – but it won't be cheap to fix

BY JACK HARRISON

One of the reasons for buying my Mazda MX-5 was that I wanted something not only fun and a bit more characterful than most modern cars but also something a bit more solid-feeling than the Fiat Coupé 20v that I had before.

It may all be there in theory (sturdy manual gearbox, simple four-cylinder engine), but in practice my MX-5 has been brought down by the little things.

I was enjoying a spirited roof-down drive when a cloud of steam began to escape from the bonnet. After pulling over as soon as possible with the temperature needle on the higher side of the range, it became apparent that it had overheated. What a shocker. The cause? The tube connecting the radiator to the coolant expansion tank had flown off, dumping all of the coolant away.

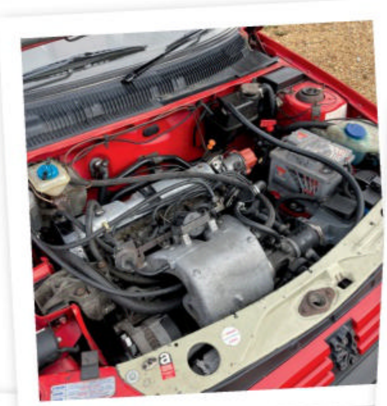
Luckily, a friend could come to rescue me, bringing some Jubilee clips and a load of coolant, and we were able to get it home. A little bit of driveway disassembly revealed that the thermostat housing was cracked, with the thermostat itself in fairly dire straits.

Our snapper is only able to enjoy his MX-5 through the lens at the moment

This discovery has left me with a dilemma. The beauty and the tragedy of my MX-5 was that it was wonderfully cheap, and replacing the thermostat housing requires taking off the head gasket - not the cheapest job and one that I'm too mechanically inept to do myself.

Strangely, I haven't missed driving my laid-up MX-5 too much. I think I'm just worried that something else will go wrong with the car the moment I sort it.

I feel a 'spares or repairs' post is coming for MX-5 Facebook groups.



Larger engine option makes the 205 GTi heavier but more muscular too

Interior is pure '80s in both appearance and condition

"It proves that you don't have to drive fast to enjoy a sports car"

But Steve is unfazed. "Every new owner is a new enthusiast," he says.

He bought it 18 months ago from a family friend. Not always a great idea, in case the car goes wrong, but so far this one hasn't split a note.

In any case, Steve had a garage check it over first. They reckoned the gearbox had been refurbished and the top of the engine rebuilt, which, assuming they were done well, is a good thing.

All that Steve has done to it is reattach the slightly sagging bumpers ("it was easy"), painted the front valance and fitted a new brake master cylinder. He tidied up the driver's seat too, but otherwise the interior is just nicely worn, which is how he plans to keep it.

The engine idles a tad roughly, but apparently that's normal for the breed. Steve has tinkered with the fuel injection system but without success.

Parts are easy to find: Steve gets any he needs from specialist Retro Race and Rally in Chichester, West Sussex.

There's no polite way of putting this, so I just come out with it: "Looks like it has been repainted." Steve's reply is well rehearsed: "Well, if it hadn't been, it would be pink now."

Reliable, rust-free and still pretty: no doubt about it, Steve has bagged a good 'un – but at a price: "It cost me £12,000. They vary in price and have actually gone down in value. What sold it to me was the drive: it felt solid and had no horrible noises, which is more important than possibly paying over the odds."

He took it to the British Motor Show this year ("my brother took his TVR, but people were more interested in the Peugeot, which made me happy!") but otherwise, to keep the mileage down, Steve keeps most journeys local.

Will he sell it? "One day, obviously, but for now I'm just enjoying it."

JOHN EVANS

CAUGHT IN THE CLASSIFIEDS

VOLKSWAGEN GOLF GTI 16V

1992, 91,000 miles, £19,995

The free-revving Mk2 Golf GTI is a brilliant hot hatch, and this Tornado Red example has the meatier engine, giving it more than enough poke to challenge a 205 GTi. It's mint, with a clean MOT, an extensive history and super-cool 15in BBS alloys.

RENAULT 5 GT TURBO

1989, 94,000 miles, £14,995

This tidy GT Turbo (which kept FWD, unlike the 'proper' Turbo) may have done a fair few miles, but almost all of its parts have been renewed at some point. It's said to drive beautifully, and we reckon it's worth a punt given that it has a 12-month MOT.

FORD ESCORT RS 1600i

1983, 73,500 miles, £19,995

An RS Turbo is a pricey fast Ford, so try this tidy RS 1600i, which is just as cool as its blown big brother. It's said to drive without any issues, it has been restored over time, with plenty of fresh bodywork added, and it will be sold with a heap of spare parts.

CITROEN AX GT

1988, 77,000 miles, £13,000

Cheap, light, fast and fun, the AX GT was a true pocket rocket. And with it being such a rare car now, we think it's worth paying over £10k for this immaculate, heavily restored example, which is said to drive superbly. Twelve months' MOT included, too.

Head to head

JACK WARRICK

2023 SUZUKI CARRY 0.7

vs

CHARLIE MARTIN

1999 SKODA FELICIA 1.6 MPI FUN

Brief: Find an interesting pick-up truck for less than £15,000

CM Ha, I've got to admire your choice of a kei truck. Forget Ford Rangers: these Japanese miniatures are what should be lining the streets of London. Has any vehicle ever had a better size-to-practicality ratio?

JW Thank you, sir. This Suzuki Carry is as functional as it is funky. Ironically, it can't carry much, with a payload capacity of just 350kg, but it will deliver that, through even the meanest width restrictors, with ease. Tell me about your Skoda.

CM I'm glad you asked. It's bright yellow and has frog upholstery. As the name suggests, it guarantees good times, and that's all you really need to know. Although I will add that, at £3990, you could buy nearly three of them for the same money as your £10,995 Carry.

JW That's because it's three times as cool. It's also virtually brand new and has four-wheel drive plus automatic headlights. Your Felicia is a dinosaur in comparison.

CM Dinosaurs are cool too – just ask Steven Spielberg. And you were meant to find something used! What's more, your Carry is as drab as it gets: silver paint on a flat grey interior, and you don't even get a proper stereo. It's a great utilitarian pick, but it will be interesting only to those who don't have to drive it.

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CIG81220	6.1 x 3.7 x 2.5m	140613576	£389.00	£478.80	£466.80
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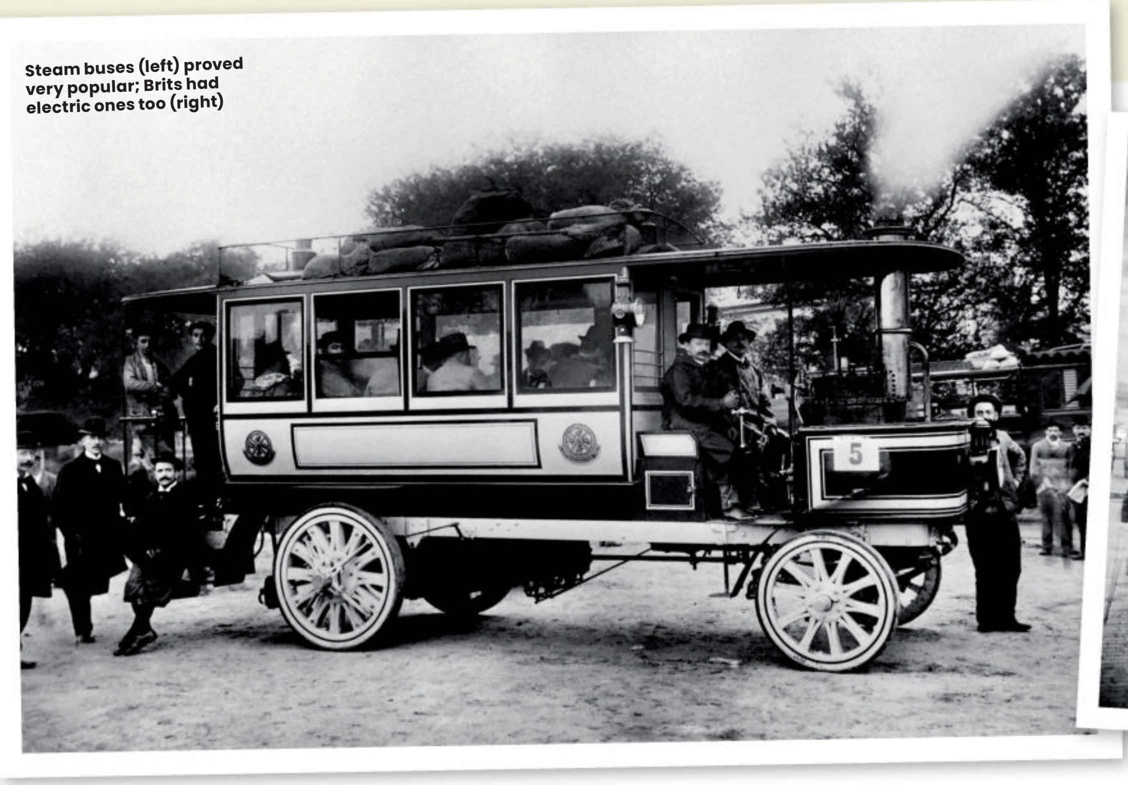
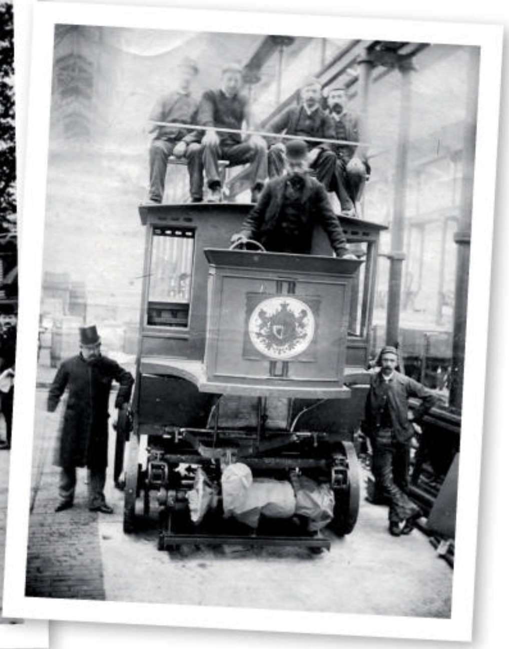


Steam buses (left) proved very popular; Brits had electric ones too (right)



The genesis of self-propelled buses and vans

It would be reasonable to assume that motorised commercial vehicles came some time later than cars, considering how puny the very first cars were. Take the Benz Viktoria of 1893, for instance: its single cylinder put out just 3hp. But you would be dead wrong: that very car was used to create the first combustion-engined bus in 1895 – the year of this magazine's foundation – and shortly afterwards the first combustion-engined van. And we can go back even further, all the way to the 1830s, when the first steam-powered buses were tried (at about 12mph) in London.

"It is evident that steam and petroleum vans are coming into more and more extensive use, and a large number of orders for them are being given out," commented Autocar no fewer than 129 years ago. "Tradespeople understand the value of these vehicles, not only for the speedy and economical delivery of goods, but also as an advertisement."

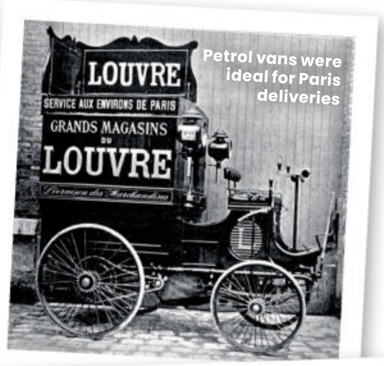
We were reporting the news that a big department store in Paris, Grands Magasins du Louvre, had taken a petrol-engined Peugeot parcel van on trial, to see whether such vehicles might be more economical to run than its 200 carts and 500 horses – which were extremely expensive.

Just two months later, we relayed: "The vehicle weighs [610kg] in running order and will carry a load of [480kg] at a speed of 9mph. It is in continuous use from 8am to 7pm. Were it horsed, the teams would have to be changed every four hours."

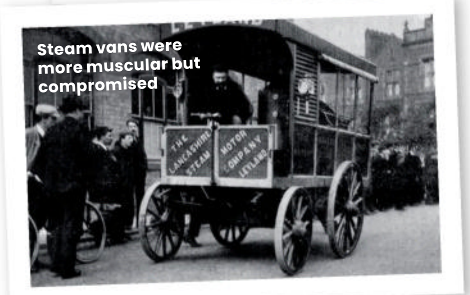
It's no surprise, then, that within a year of these petrol vans being in operation, the price of a Louvre delivery had fallen from 70c to 7c.

Another major advantage was that the removal of horses halved a vehicle's length, in theory doubling a city's traffic capacity.

"The streets in Paris are for the most part very narrow, and vans and buses take up so much space that the whole traffic is often at a standstill until these ungainly vehicles can extricate themselves. This would be certainly avoided if the traffic were much faster," we noted.



Petrol vans were ideal for Paris deliveries



Steam vans were more muscular but compromised

Boiler power had started the race in pole position but fallen at the first hurdle, we explained: "Serpollet's steam vans, constructed for [Paris clothes shop] La Belle Jardinière, were among the first to be used for the delivery of goods. [However] the machinery occupied at least one-third of the vehicle, so that a great deal of valuable space had to be sacrificed – a matter of great importance to users who have to deliver enormous quantities of goods during the course of the day."

Electric vans were also being developed, but it was found with disappointment that they could do only around 40 miles per charge.

Several steam buses were also operational in France. So novel and useful were they that Brits would book tours on them with travel agent Thomas Cook. But again, there was the limitation of the mechanicals taking up much of the available space – and attitudes towards them weren't helped by one exploding, killing a passenger.

Britain, meanwhile, continued with the development of electric buses. A large double-decker had been operational in London as far back as 1891, and in 1896 we reported on a new creation: "It has accommodation for 26 passengers and only weighs [2230kg]. The storage batteries are a new pattern and weigh but [760kg]. These are adapted to be very easily removed and recharged, the battery power being sufficient to drive the bus over any of the ordinary routes. It takes no longer to replace an exhausted set of batteries than it does to effect a change of horses at the end of a stage. The batteries are so well insulated from vibration by the system of springs on which the vehicle is hung that we are assured no acid has ever been spilled. And, of course, the running of the motor is absolutely regular, and quite different from the comparatively spasmodic jerks of horses as they drag a vehicle along."

Another benefit of a motorised bus was it being able to stop to pick up passengers. Horse-drawn ones made you board while still moving.

Petrol power may have quickly won over the van market, but the immense strength of steam power meant that many buses continued to run on coke into the 1920s and large lorries well into the 1930s.

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A21 NYS	£275
C23 OAT	£375
B22 OBB	£375
H21 OBY	£275
OBZ 552	£275
A21 OCH	£275
P23 OCT	£275
H22 ODG	£375
J23 OEE	£275
OGZ 5449	£175
OJZ 878	£275
P28 OLD	£375
T31 OLD	£275
N31 ONG	£375
C21 OPP	£375
H23 ORN	£375
H22 OSK	£175
C21 OTS	£275
H21 OTS	£275
B21 OVE	£375
N21 OVE	£375
H23 OVE	£375
H23 OWL	£375
K28 OWL	£275
OXZ 1031	£175
E21 OYD	£375
H21 OYD	£375
K31 OYD	£275
K321 PAC	£275
S200 PAD	£375
K31 PAP	£275
K121 PAS	£275
A633 PAT	£375
L29 PAW	£375
C8 PBW	£375
A4 PCD	£375
K23 PEG	£375
R121 PEG	£75
M121 PER	£275
J123 PER	£375
S300 PES	£275
K23 PET	£375
N7 PEX	£275
PGZ 1264	£75
PGZ 1265	£75
L321 PJB	£375
L23 PJC	£375
H24 PJG	£375
R222 PJM	£375
N21 PJS	£375
K26 PJW	£375
K121 PJW	£275
A15 PLC	£275
PLZ 262	£275
V121 PMC	£275
D20 PMS	£175
JG05 POT	£175
N25 POT	£275
K31 PPP	£175
K21 PPS	£275
A24 PRK	£375
L27 PRO	£375
PRZ 1012	£175
PRZ 2635	£75
E23 PUD	£375
K27 PUD	£275
K23 PUG	£375
N27 PUG	£275
J50 PUL	£375
PXI 966	£275
PXZ 1834	£75
PXZ 1835	£75
A23 RAL	£275
N27 RAL	£175
RAZ 1258	£375
RAZ 1370	£275
P111 RDA	£75
G24 RDD	£275
A24 RDH	£275
P121 REB	£275
M666 REL	£275
G007 RES	£75
K31 RES	£175
Y111 REX	£275
P700 REX	£175
C7 RFH	£275
RFZ 221	£175
RGZ 1018	£175
RGZ 2807	£75
RJZ 191	£275
L28 RKS	£275
RKZ 878	£275
E24 RLL	£275
H23 RMB	£275
K121 RMS	£275
A23 RMW	£275
K23 ROE	£275
L24 ROE	£275
A15 ROJ	£275
A23 ROL	£175
L24 ROL	£275
L600 ROW	£275
RRZ 1089	£75
RRZ 1206	£175
RRZ 1207	£175
K26 RSB	£275
G24 RUB	£175
K23 RYE	£275
K27 SAC	£275
A23 SAK	£275
R121 SAW	£275
SBZ 337	£275
H19 SCR	£275
P31 SEC	£275
K21 SED	£275
K25 SEP	£175
P321 SER	£175
P121 SES	£275
T944 SET	£75
SEZ 774	£275
SGZ 122	£275
SGZ 2357	£75
SGZ 2358	£175
SGZ 2359	£175
P27 SHO	£275
P29 SHP	£275
K123 SHY	£275
SHZ 3591	£375
SIG 1032	£275
K26 SKA	£275
L121 SLS	£275
H23 SMD	£275
Y300 SMR	£175
E22 SMY	£275
T29 SOO	£275
R121 SOO	£175
K26 SOP	£275
H23 SPR	£275
L321 SPY	£275
SRZ 1265	£75
SRZ 1361	£175
K31 SSO	£275
N60 SUL	£175
P888 SUL	£275
K600 SUS	£175
P800 SUS	£275
SXZ 2052	£75
SXZ 2053	£75
K121 TAB	£175
P21 TAC	£275
P54 TAD	£175
N25 TAF	£275
L27 TAJ	£275
H24 TAL	£275
L400 TAP	£275
P121 TAS	£275
K21 TAT	£275
TAZ 1785	£375
N27 TEE	£275
TGZ 1581	£175
K28 THE	£275
THZ 1829	£75
TIG 1698	£275
TJZ 252	£375
K27 TMB	£175
H21 TNY	£275
N653 TOD	£175
A24 TOP	£275
AS05 TOR	£275
P121 TOR	£275
L111 TPH	£75
P111 TRH	£75
TRZ 1348	£175
TRZ 1349	£175
TRZ 1352	£75
K28 TTH	£275
P28 TTT	£275
P121 TTT	£175
D23 UFO	£275
UIG 1216	£75
URZ 2234	£75
URZ 3274	£49
T29 USA	£175
E24 VEE	£275
K321 VEN	£275
VIG 122	£275
VIG 1027	£75
K31 VOS	£175
VRZ 3282	£75
VRZ 3283	£75
VRZ 3284	£75
N27 WAG	£275
P321 WAG	£175
K121 WAY	£175
A23 WBA	£275
P24 WED	£275
R121 WED	£75
S900 WED	£175
L010 WES	£275
N121 WES	£275
Y400 WES	£175
WEZ 7800	£275
WHZ 1019	£275
WIG 116	£375
WIG 2158	£175
WIG 2159	£175
K23 WLS	£275
XIG 3678	£75
XIG 3867	£75
YHZ 1490	£49
YHZ 1491	£75
YUI 1425	£75
YUI 1479	£49

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For more than a century, these road tests have been verifying, describing and illustrating the performance and characteristics in close detail, one new car at a time. Driving impressions have always been a key component part of them, around which other elements have changed. In early years, these test elements included benchmarking of braking effort, gradient climbing capability and rolling resistance. Later they expanded to take in acceleration, top speed and stopping distance, as well as cruising noise level. Cabin dimensions and measured weight became included too.

Today we use the Horiba MIRA proving ground in the Midlands to take similar performance benchmarks of new cars – and we've recently expanded the test's remit to take in braking stamina over repeated stops and, in the case of electrified cars, DC rapid-charging performance and measured acceleration at both high and low indicated state of charge. All are key indicators of the integrity of vehicle engineering in this emerging era.

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Matt Saunders, road test editor

ABARTH

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
500 Esseesse ★★★★☆	25.3.09	Charm on a stick. Raucous and fun.	7.6	6.5	1135	35.8	-
500e Turismo ★★★⯪☆	9.8.23	A stylish and entertaining pint-size EV but pricey and needs refining.	6.9	6.4	1395	-	142
595 Competizione ★★★⯪☆	26.2.14	Great when it's good but tiring when it's bad.	7.5	6.4	1135	39.2	-

ALFA ROMEO

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Giulia Quadrifoglio ★★★★⯪	29.3.17	Everything you would want a fast Alfa Romeo saloon to be. A triumph.	4.5	3.2	1700	35.7	-
Stelvio 2.2D 210 Milano Edizione ★★★⯪☆	3.1.18	Spry-handling SUV is likeable, if short of the class's usual refinements.	6.8	7.0	1815	49.7	-
Stelvio Quadrifoglio ★★★⯪☆	9.1.19	A real driver's car, but it stretches SUV-related bounds of acceptability.	4.0	3.3	1931	31.9	-
Stelvio 2.0T 280 Veloce AWD ★★★★☆	28.6.23	Short on premium refinement but meets its discreetly sporty brief well.	5.7	5.3	1784	32.2	-

ALPINE

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A110 Première Edition ★★★★★	16.5.18	Hilarious fun delivered in effusive and accessible fashion.	4.7	3.8	1125	45.6	-
A110 Légende GT ★★★★⯪	9.3.22	The best fast A110 we've seen but not quite the definitive version.	4.8	3.9	1140	40.2	-
A110 R ★★★⯪☆	15.11.23	Hardcore A110 has its lures but probably not enough of them for its price.	4.2	3.5	1094	39.7	-

ARIEL

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Atom 4 ★★★★★	9.10.19	Track-slayer is unrivalled for built-in quality and dynamic character.	3.2	2.4	680	39.2	-

ASTON MARTIN

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Vantage ★★★★⯪	18.9.24	Baby Aston grows up to spectacular effect. A machine of stunning breadth and likeability.	3.5	2.6	1745	28.5	-
DBS Superleggera ★★★★★	21.11.18	Effortlessly fast and intoxicating to drive, the big Aston is better than ever.	3.7	2.7	1910	25.6	-
DBX ★★★★⯪	28.10.20	Does everyday driver appeal better than any other super-SUV.	4.6	3.8	2328	24.8	-
DBX 707 ★★★★☆	30.11.22	A better DBX to drive, but still leaves room for improvement.	3.3	2.8	2278	26.2	-

AUDI

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A1 Sportback 35 TFSI S Line Style Edition ★★★⯪☆	2.10.19	Luxury supermini lacks the polish to justify its high price.	7.9	8.4	1209	57.0	-
S3 Sportback ★★★⯪☆	18.11.20	Audi delivers an effective if somewhat unlovable hot hatch.	4.8	4.2	1552	39.0	-
RS4 Avant ★★★★☆	14.2.18	A hot estate that oozes class but is curiously short on charisma.	4.0	3.5	1790	36.7	-
S4 TDI ★★★★☆	18.9.19	Diesel power sparks an appealingly different identity for this fast Audi.	4.6	4.1	1871	54.3	-
S5 Launch Edition ★★★★☆	15.1.25	Rounded sports saloon with a characterful V6 and new-found dose of driver appeal.	4.1	3.8	2027	33.7	-
A5 Sportback 2.0 TFSI 252PS Quattro S Line S Tronic ★★★⯪☆	8.3.17	Sleek mid-sized executive fastback is still short of a selling point beyond its style.	5.7	5.3	1535	41.1	-
A6 Avant 40 TDI S Line S Tronic ★★★★☆	14.11.18	High-tech throwback is a timely reminder of what Audi does best.	8.4	7.5	1710	50.1	-
RS6 Avant GT ★★★★☆	5.2.25	Retro visual charm meets unprecedented dynamism in big-hearted estate.	3.2	2.7	2144	26.3	-
A6 50 TFSIe Quattro S Line ★★★★☆	5.1.22	Hybrid tech boosts saloon's refinement, charm and running credentials.	5.7	5.2	2077	45.4	34
A7 Sportback 50 TDI Quattro Sport ★★★⯪☆	11.7.18	Easy on the eye and to live with but let down by stolid dynamics.	5.8	5.3	1880	53.1	-
A8 L 60 TFSIe Quattro Sport ★★★⯪☆	17.6.20	Technically impressive but not as cosseting as a limo ought to be.	-	-	2330	-	-
E-tron 55 Quattro ★★★★⯪	26.6.19	A rounded, uber-luxurious addition to the premium EV niche.	5.4	4.2	2569	-	218
E-tron S Quattro ★★★⯪☆	2.6.21	A slick, tech-laden luxury operator but no dynamic landmark for EVs.	4.2	3.6	2643	-	-
Q2 1.4 TFSI Sport ★★★⯪☆	9.11.16	Fit for purpose but a less compelling option than it might have been.	8.1	8.2	1316	-	-
SQ2 Quattro S Tronic ★★★★☆	20.3.19	More fun than you might expect from a crossover or an Audi S model.	4.5	4.1	1530	34.5	-
Q4 E-tron 40 Sport ★★★⯪☆	7.7.21	Practical, pleasant and efficient but not a superior premium product.	8.1	7.8	2112	-	-
Q5 2.0 TDI 190PS Quattro S Line S Tronic ★★★★☆	15.3.17	Like the previous Q5 but with additional class, dynamism and polish.	8.3	8.5	1770	42.5	-
SQ5 TSI Quattro ★★★⯪☆	21.6.17	Mid-sized performance SUV bites off more than it can chew.	5.5	5.0	1870	32.6	-
SQ5 Sportback TDI Quattro ★★★⯪☆	3.8.22	Not the sharpest fast SUV, but the real-world appeal is clear to see.	5.1	4.6	2023	49.0	-
Q6 E-tron Quattro Edition 1 ★★★⯪☆	2.10.24	EV is hard to love, easier to recommend, with good dynamics and strong EV credentials.	5.3	4.3	–	2.8	247
Q7 3.0 TDI Quattro S Line ★★★★☆	12.8.15	Chiselled, plush, suave and spacious. Only so-so to drive, though.	6.2	6.2	2245	-	-
SQ7 4.0 TDI Quattro ★★★★⯪	26.10.16	A class-topping blend of superlative comfort and usable performance.	5.1	4.5	2330	37.9	-
Q8 50 TDI S Line ★★★★☆	26.9.18	Striking and effective SUV-coupé leaves us wanting more.	6.9	6.7	2285	40.1	-
R8 V10 Plus ★★★★☆	30.12.15	Supercar grips and goes even harder but wants for its predecessor's delicacy.	3.1	2.6	1730	-	-

BENTLEY

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Bentayga W12 ★★★★⯪	18.5.16	Versatile, genteel, luxurious SUV with a silken sporting edge.	4.9	4.4	2440	-	-
Bentayga EWB Mulliner Blackline ★★★★☆	24.4.24	Stretched SUV lacks the Mulsanne limo's charm but is a better luxury car by far.	4.4	3.8	2600	25.6	-
Continental GT W12 First Edition ★★★★⯪	2.5.18	Superb luxury coupé has added dynamism but not enough to top the class.	3.6	2.9	2295	26.4	-
Continental GT Speed ★★★★☆	22.12.21	Remains a wonderful grand tourer but can fall short as an entertainer.	3.4	2.7	2279	22.0	-
Continental GTC V8 S ★★★★⯪	19.4.23	Sporty V8 execution adds vivacity to a car that makes you feel good.	3.6	3.2	2295	29.1	-
Flying Spur W12 ★★★★⯪	15.7.20	Trounces rivals for driver appeal but not in every way that matters.	3.9	3.2	2500	32.5	-
Flying Spur Hybrid Mulliner ★★★★⯪	17.8.22	Mightily convincing PHEV limo more than earns its Bentley wings.	4.4	3.9	2596	30.1	28

BMW

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
120 M Sport	★★★⯪☆	31.12.24	Credible and complete junior BMW still lacks distinguishing driver appeal.	7.3	6.8	1489	45.8	-
218i M Sport Gran Coupé	★★★☆☆	8.4.20	Junior Gran Coupé hits some high notes but fails to inspire.	8.8	8.4	1375	58.2	-
220i M Sport Coupé	★★★★☆	1.6.22	A good coupé rather than a great sports car.	7.3	7.3	1546	46.8	-
M2 Coupé Manual	★★★★⯪	12.7.23	Junior M car takes huge objective leaps but smaller subjective ones.	4.5	3.8	1687	32.1	-
320d M Sport Auto	★★★★★	15.5.19	BMW's one-time default-choice executive saloon hits even greater heights.	6.9	6.8	1639	63.3	-
330d xDrive M Sport Plus Edition Touring	★★★★⯪	15.1.20	An estate that's powerful, classy and great to drive – but with a price to match.	5.5	5.2	1922	52.6	-
330e M Sport	★★★★⯪	1.7.20	Slicker and sweeter-handling than the average PHEV. A true 3 Series.	-	-	1740	-	-
M440i xDrive	★★★★☆	6.1.21	A rounded, engaging and potent coupé let down only by its looks.	4.1	3.7	1775	44.0	-
M4 Competition	★★★★⯪	21.4.21	A very modern M car and a brilliantly versatile and enjoyable one.	3.9	2.9	1800	32.7	-
i4 M50	★★★★☆	19.1.22	Fast, refined and with lots of traditional appeal to convert sceptics.	4.1	3.2	2248	-	186
M4 CSL	★★★★☆	16.11.22	A next-level M car, with the more complex temperament to match.	3.6	2.7	1625	31.1	-
M5	★★★⯪☆	29.1.25	A technical leap, but one born more out of necessity than inspiration.	3.5	2.8	2373	27.3	35
i5 eDrive40 M Sport Pro	★★★⯪☆	29.11.23	Has dynamic appeal but less convincing than BMW's other EV saloons.	5.4	4.4	2213	-	235
550e xDrive M Sport Pro	★★★★☆	3.4.24	Undeniably capable and a fine plug-in hybrid sports saloon.	4.4	3.5	2232	40.1	47
i7 xDrive60 M Sport	★★★★⯪	15.2.23	It has taken huge strides as a luxury car – and still drives like a BMW.	4.5	3.4	2758	-	264
840d xDrive	★★★★☆	16.1.19	A likeable big GT, albeit not the most luxurious or rewarding on sale.	5.0	4.6	1901	49.2	-
M8 Competition Convertible	★★★⯪☆	5.2.20	Has attitude to spare but isn't the complete super-GT.	3.3	2.7	2020	31.6	-
M8 Competition	★★★⯪☆	3.6.20	Highly capable but doesn't truly satisfy as either a sports car or a GT.	-	-	1960	-	-
X1 xDrive23i M Sport	★★★⯪☆	25.1.23	A decent family crossover but a poor BMW.	6.4	6.0	1800	45.6	-
X4 M Competition	★★★☆☆	13.11.19	Fast and precise, if short on the big-time charisma that you would expect.	4.0	3.3	2028	29.0	-
X5 xDrive30d M Sport	★★★★☆	2.1.19	Better to drive than the SUV norm but not better across the board.	6.6	6.6	2279	43.1	-
X6 M Competition	★★★☆☆	20.3.24	Unyielding performance focus makes for a fast but compromised SUV.	3.5	3.1	2442	29.3	-
X7 M50i M Performance xDrive	★★★★☆	9.9.20	Stunningly large and enviably refined but too excessive for many.	4.8	3.9	2583	30.5	-
X7 M60i xDrive	★★★★☆	29.3.23	Uncompromising-looking X7 is seriously fast but laudably refined.	4.2	3.7	2600	28.9	-
iX xDrive50 M Sport	★★★★⯪	2.3.22	Takes the luxury EV to elevated heights, but its design is easy to criticise.	4.4	3.4	2593	-	252
Z4 M40i with Handschalter Pack	★★★★☆	21.8.24	Manual gearbox gives six-year-old roadster new depth.	5.7	5.9	1561	36.9	-

BMW ALPINA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
B3 GT Touring	★★★★⯪	15.1.25	Last-dance B3 has mighty breadth and will go down as one of the all-time greats.	3.3	2.7	1910	29.4	-
B8 Gran Coupé	★★★★☆	22.9.21	Superbly rounded but lacking some dynamism implied by its looks.	3.5	2.8	2100	-	-

BYD

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Atto 3 Design	★★★☆☆	31.5.23	Lack of attention to detail detracts from the impressive battery tech.	7.0	6.2	1787	-	201
Seal Design	★★★⯪☆	17.1.24	Frustrating software lets down the mostly impressive hardware.	5.8	4.7	2116	-	279

CATERHAM

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Seven 160	★★★★☆	20.11.13	Fun entry-level version of B-road toy smacks just a little of compromise.	8.4	8.7	510	44.8	-
Seven 620S	★★★★⯪	9.3.16	Supplies fun intravenously with a mix of freneticism and road-going usability.	3.8	4.2	650	29.5	-
Seven 420 Cup	★★★★⯪	31.8.22	Track-day variant serves up sensational driving thrills – for a price.	4.2	3.4	560	35.3	-

CHEVROLET

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Corvette 3LT	★★★★☆	22.6.22	Big step up for charismatic, usable and temptingly priced American icon.	3.9	3.2	1679	32.9	-
Corvette Z06 3LZ	★★★★☆	16.8.23	Incredible engine and chassis makeover, but the price has to be right.	3.1	2.4	1670	26.1	-

CITROEN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ami Colour	★★⯪☆☆	11.1.23	Cleverly conceived but hard to recommend, given its limited capabilities.	-	-	471	-	39
C3 Puretech 110 Flair	★★★⯪☆	28.12.16	Dynamically challenged, but a cheery design makes this supermini interesting.	9.6	9.4	1050	62.3	-
C3 Aircross Puretech 110 Flair	★★★⯪☆	7.3.18	Practical small crossover isn't outstanding to drive but is likeable nonetheless.	11.5	10.7	1159	39.5	-
C4 Puretech 130 Shine Plus Auto	★★★☆☆	26.5.21	Has rational and irrational appeal but lacks a fine-tuned execution.	9.5	9.2	1320	56.4	-
ë-C4 X Shine	★★★⯪☆	3.5.23	EV motoring done differently, with value, but its successes are qualified.	9.7	8.8	1623	-	162
C5 Aircross BlueHDi 180 Flair Plus	★★★⯪☆	13.2.19	Attractive and interesting, although its style is better than its substance.	9.0	8.5	1540	47.8	-
C5 X Puretech 180 Shine Plus	★★★★☆	28.9.22	Good value and comfy, this is the kind of car that Citroën should be making.	7.8	7.1	1502	47.8	-

CUPRA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Born 204PS 58kWh V3	★★★⯪☆	6.7.22	As good as the family hatchback EV class gets in places but not as good as it could be.	6.7	6.2	1794	-	220
Born VZ First Edition	★★★★☆	9.10.24	An already fine electric car's driver appeal is lifted but not transformed.	5.4	4.2	1996	3.5	269
Leon Estate 310PS VZ3	★★★★☆	8.9.21	Fiercely quick and dependable but pulls the heartstrings only lightly.	4.9	4.3	1707	40.1	-
Leon 2.0 TSI 245PS VZ2	★★★★☆	27.7.22	Brilliantly rounded hot hatch shines in its simplest spec.	5.9	4.7	1468	43.4	-
Ateca 2.0 TSI 4Drive DSG	★★★⯪☆	23.1.19	Hot crossover is objectively impressive but lacks true driver reward.	4.9	4.4	1615	36.7	-
Formentor 2.0 TSI 4Drive VZ2 DSG	★★★★⯪	3.2.21	Versatile, interesting, rewarding. One of the best fast crossovers yet.	5.1	4.3	1583	36.4	-
Tavascan V1	★★★☆☆	5.2.25	Electric SUV is competent but not very compelling or memorable.	6.0	5.0	2129	3.2	246

DACIA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Sandero Stepway TCe 90 Prestige	★★★★☆	28.4.21	Cut-price crossover is compromised in surprisingly few areas.	11.9	11.9	1096	54.1	-
Duster SCe 115 4x2 Comfort	★★★★☆	22.8.18	Comfortable, simple SUV keeps its budget family motoring star quality.	13.1	12.6	1286	42.2	-
Duster Hybrid 140 Journey	★★★★⯪	27.11.24	Notably improved yet barely any pricier.	9.7	8.7	1413	40.2	-
Jogger TCe 110 Comfort	★★★★⯪	20.4.22	Superb versatility, outstanding value and so likeable with it.	11.0	11.0	1267	48.5	-

DS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3 Crossback Puretech 155 Prestige	★★★☆☆	10.7.19	No design smash hit. Short on perceived quality and dynamic polish.	8.8	8.3	1205	48.6	-
4 E-Tense 225 Performance Line+	★★★⯪☆	29.6.22	High price and a list of niggles keep this family hatchback away from the top.	7.4	6.0	1706	44.7	26
7 Crossback Puretech 225 Prestige	★★★⯪☆	19.9.18	DS's first SUV is a competent but slightly bland addition to the class.	8.6	7.0	1616	44.6	-
7 E-Tense 4x4 360 La Première	★★★⯪☆	26.4.23	More focused and makes subtle gains, but its powertrain and ride frustrate.	5.7	4.6	1956	36.6	29
9 E-Tense 225 Performance Line Plus	★★★⯪☆	2.2.22	Posh saloon is alternative and devoted to its luxury remit but no show-stopper.	8.6	7.1	1886	44.7	20

FERRARI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
296 GTB	★★★★★	21.12.22	Stellar modern-era Ferrari supercar has an unrivalled breadth of talent.	2.7	1.9	1648	37.8	15
SF90 Stradale	★★★★☆	3.11.21	Sets the performance benchmark but isn't a track-handling great.	2.5	1.8	1698	24.4	16

FIAT

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Panda 1.2 Easy	★★★★⯪	25.4.12	Was everything a city car ought to be but is now way past its prime.	14.6	15.6	1020	49.1	-
Panda 4x4 Twinair	★★★★☆	17.4.13	A lovable four-wheel-drive miniature that trades space for style and charm.	14.6	15.8	1195	44.2	-
500 1.4 Lounge	★★★★☆	19.9.07	Enjoyable city car with the substance to back up its style.	10.3	10.4	1065	42.8	-
500C 1.2 Pop	★★★★☆	5.8.09	Landaulet hits the spot every bit as well as the regular hatchback and is often better.	13.2	14.4	1035	48.3	-

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
500 Twinair Lounge	★★★½☆	24.11.10	Characterful and stylish, but its real-world economy lets it down.	11.7	13.0	1070	42.1	-
500e 42kWh Icon	★★★★☆	26.1.22	More than just an electric city car and a welcome return to form.	8.1	7.7	1365	-	142
600e La Prima	★★★½☆	27.3.24	Electric crossover is decent value and easy to drive but otherwise a bit easy to overlook.	8.8	7.7	1587	-	173

FORD

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Fiesta 1.0 Ecoboost 125PS Titanium	★★★★½	9.8.17	A dynamically brilliant supermini but no longer the best one.	6.6	7.8	1218	48.2	-
Fiesta ST	★★★★½	15.8.18	Great to drive and supreme value but not better than before in all aspects.	6.6	7.8	1218	48.2	-
Focus 1.5 Ecoboost 182PS ST-Line X	★★★★½	20.2.19	Better to drive and look at than before and impressively good value.	8.9	7.8	1417	43.8	-
Focus ST	★★★★☆	11.9.19	Big on character and performance but not quite truly immersive.	6.1	4.9	1433	40.7	-
Puma 1.0T 125PS MHEV Titanium	★★★★½	25.3.20	The driver's car the compact crossover class has been crying out for and more besides.	10.0	9.6	1260	50.0	-
Puma ST	★★★★☆	24.3.21	Well judged, versatile and fun. The jacked-up hot hatch done well.	7.2	6.2	1301	41.5	-
Explorer Extended Range Premium RWD	★★★½☆	23.10.24	Electric family crossover is better to drive than rivals, but at a cost.	5.8	4.8	2067	2.9	262
Kuga 2.5 PHEV ST-Line	★★★½☆	24.6.20	Good value and potentially frugal, but this SUV has more to give.	-	-	1844	-	-
Mustang Mach-E Extended Range RWD	★★★★☆	23.6.21	Worthy of the name? Perhaps not, but it's still impressive and likeable.	6.8	5.6	2130	-	-
Mustang Mach-E GT AWD	★★★☆☆	27.4.22	Has its moments but lacks the dynamism of a typical fast Ford.	4.2	3.5	2298	-	-
Mustang Dark Horse	★★★½☆	20.11.24	Brimming with character but more compromised than many of its forebears.	4.5	3.5	1853	26.1	-
Tourneo Courier 1.0 Ecoboost Titanium	★★★½☆	10.7.24	Has some Ford-typical star quality but not enough for the money.	10.8	10.6	1426	47.4	-
Transit Custom L2H1 320 2.0 EcoBlue 150PS Limited	★★★★☆	8.5.24	Likely to remain the default commercial vehicle, despite a high price.	12.1	11.8	1971	38.8	-
Ranger 2.0TD EcoBlue 205PS Wildtrak	★★★★½	14.6.23	Pick-up truck is practical, car-like to drive and generally hard to fault.	9.8	9.9	2348	36.6	-
F-150 Lightning Platinum	★★★½☆	17.5.23	Electric truck has huge utility and appealing range, but its size and price will put many off.	4.5	3.7	3121	-	288

GENESIS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
G70 2.2 CRDi Luxury Line	★★★½☆	10.11.21	Likeable left-field choice struggles to threaten the establishment.	7.2	6.7	1751	60.4	-
Electrified G80	★★★½☆	12.10.22	Electric limo doesn't quite hit the mark like its Kia and Hyundai platform-mates.	4.4	4.0	2349	-	272
GV60 Sport Plus	★★★★☆	24.8.22	Handsome, fast, sophisticated electric crossover is the best Genesis yet.	3.8	3.1	2192	-	220
GV80 3.0D Luxury 5-Seater	★★★½☆	15.9.21	Rich, spacious and comfortable but not a world-class luxury SUV yet.	6.7	6.6	2217	45.0	-

GWM ORA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Funky Cat 48kWh First Edition	★★½☆☆	1.2.23	Electric hatch is decent value and has funky looks but is a mediocre experience overall.	7.7	7.2	1580	-	154

HONDA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
E Advance	★★★½☆	26.8.20	More than just a pretty face in the EV crowd but its limited range is an issue.	7.9	-	1535	-	110
Jazz 1.5 i-MMD Hybrid EX	★★★½☆	7.10.20	Eminently practical, impressively frugal and pretty joyless to drive.	9.6	10.0	1248	57.0	-
Civic Type R GT	★★★★½	25.10.17	Hot hatch is a sheer delight for enthusiast drivers and their bank balances.	5.7	7.1	1400	57.0	-
HR-V e:HEV Advance Style	★★★½☆	24.11.21	Fine ergonomics and big on superficial charm but leaves us cold.	9.2	9.3	1397	43.2	-
e:Ny1 Advance	★★★☆☆	1.11.23	EV is charming in some ways but has too little substance to justify the price.	8.6	6.9	1756	-	211

HYUNDAI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
i10 1.2 MPi Premium	★★★★☆	15.4.20	Smallest Hyundai regains leadership of the city car class.	12.3	12.9	999	52.5	-
i20 1.0 T-GDi 100 48V SE Connect	★★★½☆	24.2.21	Steady gains for a versatile runabout still lacking some personality.	9.7	10.1	1065	63.5	-
i20 N	★★★★½	25.8.21	N division's finest car to date. A serious hot hatch with real dynamic polish.	6.1	5.4	1231	50.6	-
i30 Tourer 1.4 T-GDi Premium SE	★★★½☆	13.9.17	Competent, servile, inoffensive-looking family estate offers little to like or dislike.	9.5	9.7	1425	48.9	-
i30 N Performance	★★★½☆	28.12.17	Hyundai's first hot hatch attempt is fast and full-blooded with rough edges.	6.4	5.6	1478	43.1	-
Ioniq 6 RWD Ultimate	★★★½☆	7.6.23	Usable, rangy and innovative EV let down by cabin packaging and ride.	7.2	6.2	2006	-	272
Kona 1.0 120PS Advance	★★★★☆	6.9.23	Hyundai brings some cheer, value and space to the compact crossover class.	10.4	10.3	1352	50.4	-
Tucson 1.6 T-GDi Hybrid Premium	★★★★☆	17.3.21	Tucson shows that Hyundai can do both style and substance.	7.6	6.2	1612	47.7	-
Ioniq 5 N	★★★★★	7.8.24	A little big and heavy, but compelling like no other EV to date.	3.5	2.7	2221	-	224
Santa Fe Hybrid 4WD Premium	★★★★☆	16.10.24	A superb lounge on wheels, but let down by its powertrain.	7.9	7.5	2007	32.9	-
Nexo	★★★½☆	12.6.19	Impressive effort that heads in the right direction for hydrogen fuel cell cars.	9.6	9.7	1852	-	-

INEOS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Grenadier 3.0 T Fieldmaster	★★★½☆	20.9.23	Unquestionably a serious proposition but maybe lacking in innovation.	8.0	8.1	2682	20.9	-

JAGUAR

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
XE 2.0 200PS R-Sport	★★★★½	1.7.15	Junior saloon hits the spot, matching the best of its German rivals at their own game.	7.6	6.7	1530	48.7	-
XF 2.0d 180PS R-Sport	★★★★½	2.12.15	A more mature, better all-round prospect, with excellent dynamics.	9.4	9.0	1595	-	-
XF Sportbrake 300PS R-Sport AWD	★★★½☆	17.4.19	Estate is built on enthusiast values but in need of a wider update.	6.6	6.2	1727	36.8	-
E-Pace D180 AWD SE	★★★½☆	11.4.18	Misses the mark for keen drivers but is a desirable SUV nevertheless.	9.9	10.5	1768	49.2	-
I-Pace EV400 S	★★★★½	12.9.18	Jaguar's landmark car strikes a heavy blow to Tesla's luxury EV monopoly.	4.5	3.5	2236	-	-
F-Pace 2.0d AWD R-Sport	★★★★☆	11.5.16	By and large, and engine apart, this is the Jaguar SUV that we hoped it would be.	9.2	9.7	1775	-	-
F-Pace SVR	★★★★½	24.7.19	Broad-batted and can vividly thrill but hasn't forgotten its SUV roots.	4.1	3.5	2070	29.4	-
F-Pace 400e R-Dynamic HSE	★★★★½	1.12.21	Facelift hits the mark. Electrification is a mixed but creditable success.	5.1	4.6	2264	-	24
F-Type V8 S Convertible	★★★★☆	12.6.13	As good to drive as it is to behold – but at a material and financial cost.	4.0	3.4	1810	28.5	-
F-Type V6 S Coupé	★★★★½	11.6.14	Stunning looks and a sensation to drive but not quite unequalled.	4.9	4.2	1755	32.5	-
F-Type 2.0 R-Dynamic Coupé	★★★★☆	22.11.17	Plenty of driver appeal, but its cracking chassis merits a better engine.	5.7	5.1	1640	43.6	-
F-Type P575 R AWD Coupé	★★★★☆	29.4.20	The same likeable bruiser behind those prettier features.	-	-	1743	-	-

JEEP

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Avenger Electric Summit	★★★½☆	24.1.24	Not perfect but successfully takes Jeep in a fresh direction.	8.3	6.9	1601	-	172

TOP 3

BEST LARGE SUVs

1 Range Rover Sport

2 BMW X5

3 Land Rover Defender

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

Road tests revisited

2003 VW GOLF R32 3DR

Golf ends its prosperous fourth era as a wild six-cylinder hot hatch. "The best Golf in years. In dynamic terms, it trounces everything else Volkswagen currently makes. Yet as an entertainer, it somehow falls just short of the high standards set by the Ford Focus RS."

Price £26,040
Engine V6, 3189cc, petrol
Power 237bhp at 6250rpm
Torque 236lb ft at 2800-3200rpm
Weight 1477kg
0-60mph 6.5sec
0-100mph 15.6sec
Top speed 153mph
Economy 21.7mpg

1965 MERCEDES 190D

Thirty years of development has led to "certainly the most refined and free-revving four-cylinder diesel car" – of which there are few. "This sort of spaciousness, comfort and ease of control, linked to the running costs of a small 1100cc petrol car, is absolutely captivating."

Price £1869
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1988cc, diesel
Power 60bhp at 4200rpm
Torque 87lb ft at 2400rpm
Weight 1466kg
0-30mph 8.1sec
0-60mph 38.7sec
Top speed 80mph
Economy 32.2mpg

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Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Compass 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited	★★★½☆	3.10.18	Pricey, pokey, gruff Jeep is a long shot for SUV market success.	11.0	11.5	1540	44.8	-
Compass 4xe S	★★★☆☆	16.2.22	Not without niche appeal but off the pace in too many respects.	6.4	5.7	1872	46.9	22
Renegade 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited	★★★½☆	28.10.15	Charmingly authentic but also pricey and rather rough and ready.	10.8	11.2	1502	52.6	-
Renegade 4xe Trailhawk	★★★☆☆	30.6.21	Electrified Jeep has some charm but is typically rough and ready.	6.7	5.6	1816	39.4	21
Wrangler 2.2 Multijet II Overland	★★★★☆	10.4.19	Off-road icon is now more competent on it.	9.0	9.1	2122	37.6	-

KGM

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Tivoli XLV ELX Auto	★★★☆☆	14.9.16	Practical, well-priced crossover is competent but far from compelling.	12.0	12.6	1469	-	-

KIA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Picanto 1.0 MPI 2	★★★½☆	11.9.24	No great advance for the breed but likeable, capable and still here.	13.4	13.9	985	51.4	-
Ceed 1.6 CRDi 115bhp 2	★★★★☆	29.8.18	Big step up in the family hatchback class is a watershed moment for Kia.	9.9	9.6	1411	70.3	-
Proceed 1.4 T-GDi GT-Line S	★★★½☆	27.2.19	Alluring and interesting but not quite as special to drive as it looks.	9.5	8.9	1475	42.6	-
Xceed 1.4 T-GDi First Edition	★★★½☆	20.11.19	Looks good and drives well but lacks some practicality and polish.	9.3	8.7	1452	46.8	-
Soul EV Urban	★★★½☆	5.7.23	Not actually that cheap but likeable and complete.	8.0	8.3	1569	-	147
Niro EV 3	★★★★☆	7.9.22	A good family EV made better, despite some missed opportunities.	6.9	5.6	1739	-	246
EV3 81.4kWh GT-Line	★★★★☆	31.12.24	New-era Niro is rationally compelling but not a game-changer.	7.2	6.4	1858	2.6	265
Sportage 1.6 HEV 2WD GT-Line S	★★★½☆	15.6.22	Bold family SUV catches the eye but won't hold your interest to drive.	7.3	6.4	1658	44.8	-
EV6 77.4kWh RWD GT-Line S	★★★★☆	9.10.24	Not the outstanding EV it once was but still a likeably bold choice.	7.5	6.3	-	2.9	227
EV6 GT	★★★½☆	4.10.23	Lots of pace and usability for the money but not enough driver appeal.	3.6	2.7	2161	-	209
Sorento 1.6 HEV T-GDi AWD 2	★★★½☆	20.1.21	Lacks polish, but its abundant utility appeal and value shine through.	8.5	7.9	2006	43.3	-
EV9 GT-Line S	★★★★☆	31.1.24	Style, space, versatility and range for a more reasonable price than rivals.	5.1	4.6	2660	-	220

LAMBORGHINI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Huracán Performante	★★★★½	11.10.17	Breathtaking track makeover brings it close to greatness.	2.9	2.0	1590	22.4	-
Huracán Evo RWD	★★★★½	20.5.20	Finest driver's car Lamborghini makes is also the most attainable.	-	-	1389	-	-
Revuelto	★★★★½	4.12.24	New-era V12 Lamborghini is an extraordinary statement of intent.	2.5	1.7	1960	24.1	6
Urus	★★★★☆	3.7.19	Italy's latest 'mostro' has a driving experience to blow your mind.	3.3	2.8	2285	28.5	-

LAND ROVER

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Range Rover Evoque P300e R-Dynamic HSE	★★★★½	10.2.21	A better plug-in compact SUV. Expensive but slick and luxurious.	6.8	5.9	2158	32.7	24
Discovery Sport D180 AWD SE	★★★★☆	8.1.20	Off-road fidelity and character outweigh a lacklustre powertrain.	10.3	10.5	2145	47.5	-
Discovery TD6 HSE Luxury	★★★★½	12.4.17	A proper Land Rover, modernised, refined and as likeable as ever.	8.7	8.8	2230	-	-
Range Rover Velar D240 HSE	★★★½☆	30.8.17	Stylish, advanced and accomplished but in need of a better powertrain.	9.3	9.0	2089	48.2	-
Defender 110 P400 X	★★★★½	13.5.20	World-class capability. Brilliant on and off road – at a price.	-	-	2388	-	-
Range Rover Sport D300 Dynamic SE	★★★★½	2.11.22	Deeply appealing and deeply accomplished, with a price to match.	7.2	6.6	2511	42.5	-
Range Rover Sport SV Edition One	★★★½☆	28.8.24	More capable than most rivals, but others are more compelling.	3.9	5.1	2546	28.9	-
Range Rover D350 HSE	★★★★½	13.7.22	A fantastically well-isolated luxury car and fully paid-up capable 4x4.	6.3	6.0	2667	35.9	-

LEXUS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
LBX FWD Premium Plus Design	★★★½☆	29.5.24	Crossover convinces as a small premium car, but only just.	8.4	8.4	1306	45.2	-
NX 350h AWD Premium Plus Pack	★★★★☆	16.3.22	Interesting, refined and efficient, but not as polished as the best.	7.1	6.7	1812	44.7	-
RX 500h F Sport	★★★½☆	22.3.23	Classy and luxurious, but that might not be enough for keener drivers.	6.1	5.5	2088	31.7	-
ES 300h Takumi	★★★½☆	6.2.19	Boldly styled, economical saloon has a singularly rational but dry character.	8.7	7.6	1742	48.8	-
LS 500h Premier	★★★☆☆	6.6.18	Limo has never been more appealing or less competitive in key areas.	5.9	5.3	2404	42.2	-
RC F Ultimate Edition	★★★½☆	6.11.24	Bellows in some ways, whispers in others. A little flawed but never dull or boring.	4.7	3.8	1733	30.1	-
LM 350h AWD Takumi	★★★☆☆	7.2.24	MPV is a fascinating luxury-market curio but no threat to the old-school limo.	8.6	8.2	2368	40.5	-

LOTUS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Eletre R	★★★½☆	24.7.24	There's plenty to like about the new Lotus but little sign of the old Lotus.	3.1	2.2	2682	-	216

MASERATI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ghibli Diesel	★★★½☆	12.3.14	Saloon isn't lacking in style but is a little short on substance.	6.5	6.0	2040	40.4	-
Grecale Trofeo	★★★½☆	18.10.23	A belting engine but high-priced and not the best-driving Grecale.	3.6	3.2	2097	33.6	-
Levante Diesel	★★★☆☆	30.11.16	A mildly interesting also-ran, with a weak engine and so-so handling.	6.8	6.9	2205	41.5	-
Levante S Granlusso	★★★½☆	8.5.19	Better engine improves the class's curate's egg but can't redeem it.	5.1	4.5	2232	23.7	-
Granturismo Trofeo	★★★½☆	11.9.24	An appealing grand tourer that lacks some sophistication for the price.	3.6	3.1	-	33.0	-
MC20 Cielo	★★★★☆	16.10.24	Dynamic iconoclast, old-school charmer, occasional GT. A unique supercar.	4.0	2.8	1783	29.6	-

MAZDA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
2 1.5 Skyactiv-G 90PS SE-L Nav	★★★★☆	22.4.15	The go-to option for keen drivers is also a convincing all-rounder.	10.4	11.0	1050	-	-
3 2.0 Skyactiv-X 181PS GT Sport	★★★★☆	6.11.19	Sweet to drive and great to behold, but the Skyactiv-X engine is no knockout.	9.1	9.1	1425	57.0	-
MX-30 145PS GT Sport Tech	★★★½☆	10.3.21	Has smart looks and a plush interior, but the first Mazda EV deserved more.	9.1	8.6	1663	-	-

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*For three weeks from publication date

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
CX-5 2.2D 150PS 2WD Sport Nav	★★★★☆	28.6.17	Still moderately left of field but now likeable in greater proportions.	9.4	9.2	1620	53.9	-
CX-60 e-Skyactiv D 3.3 RWD Exclusive-Line	★★★⯪☆	10.5.23	Old-school in all the best ways, but the ride is difficult to overlook.	7.6	7.2	1893	52.3	-
MX-5 1.5 SE-L Nav	★★★★⯪	2.9.15	An outstanding and usable sports car at an outstanding price.	8.4	7.9	1050	-	-

McLAREN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
720S	★★★★★	24.5.17	Sufficiently complete and exciting to dominate rivals and hugely fast.	2.9	2.0	1419	24.2	-
750S	★★★★☆	19.6.24	McLaren's mainstay is a bit of a wild child – at times, to its own cost.	2.9	2.0	1412	28.8	-
Artura	★★★★⯪	19.10.22	Brilliantly packaged, invitingly poised and wise use of electrification.	3.2	2.1	1552	32.9	17
Artura Spider	★★★★⯪	6.11.24	Artura finds extra form in convertible guise.	3.1	2.2	1618	27.2	17
GT	★★★⯪☆	27.1.21	Plenty of pace and purity, less GT-typical usability and refinement.	3.3	2.3	1580	34.2	

MERCEDES-AMG

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A45 S 4Matic+ Plus	★★★★⯪	4.3.20	AMG brings its hottest hatch yet to life without harming usability.	4.1	3.3	1661	41.5	-
C63 S E Performance 4Matic+ Night Edition Premium Plus Estate	★★★☆☆	31.7.24	Fascinating engineering feat falls flat as an exciting super-estate.	3.3	2.8	2217	27.1	7.1
GT 63 4Matic+ 4-Door Coupé	★★★★⯪	13.3.19	AMG defies physics with a four-door GT that handles beautifully.	3.3	2.7	2135	30.1	-
GT 63 S E Performance 4-Door Coupé	★★★⯪☆	21.6.23	Rocket-ship GT with astonishing powertrain but still lacks driver reward.	2.9	2.5	2339	23.9	6
EQS 53 4Matic+ Night Edition	★★★★☆	8.6.22	Good but doesn't quite live up to its spectacular on-paper potential.	3.6	2.8	2673	-	259
S63 E Performance Night Edition	★★★★☆	2.10.24	Prodigiously quick, confoundingly slick in its handling, but has a coarseness to it.	3.5	2.7	2666	26.1	-
GLE 53 4Matic+ Premium Plus	★★★⯪☆	14.10.20	Remarkable dynamic versatility but lacks some driver appeal.	5.4	4.9	2471	29.4	-
SL 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus	★★★⯪☆	26.7.23	Stonking V8 doesn't quite redeem a car of as many sacrifices as gains.	3.5	2.8	1939	26.2	-
GT 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus Coupé	★★★⯪☆	14.8.24	Fearsomely quick and truly usable but less lovable than before.	3.1	2.7	1972	30.7	-

MERCEDES-BENZ

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A200 Sport	★★★★☆	4.7.18	Luxurious and desirable but not good enough to drive to take top spot.	8.7	7.9	1375	56.7	-
A200 AMG Line Executive	★★★★☆	24.5.23	Significant progress for a keen-handling and efficient premium hatch.	7.8	7.3	1396	59.3	-
A250e AMG Line Premium	★★★☆☆	5.8.20	Falls some way short of a rounded 'premium' driving experience.	6.7	5.4	1665	57.8	-
B180 Sport	★★★★☆	3.4.19	In an ever-shrinking niche, this compact MPV deserves consideration.	8.4	8.3	1405	51.3	-
CLA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★☆☆	21.8.19	Nearer the mark to look at but still way wide of it as a driver's car.	6.8	6.1	1555	48.3	-
C300e AMG Line	★★★★⯪	4.5.22	Long-range hybrid tech gives C-Class an outstanding selling point.	5.8	5.1	2005	49.0	48
E220d AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★★☆	3.1.24	An effective blend of convention, comfort, luxury and modernity.	7.2	5.9	1917	65.8	-
EQE 350+ AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★⯪☆	4.1.23	Hot on comfort and tech but lacklustre on range, material quality and space.	6.0	5.5	2386	-	262
EQS 450 Business Class SUV	★★★⯪☆	6.3.24	Ultra-luxurious seven-seater strays confusingly into MPV territory.	5.5	5.2	2899	-	265
S580e L AMG Line Premium Plus Executive	★★★★⯪	6.4.22	Plug-in S-Class is the best of an otherwise ordinary generation.	5.2	4.2	2530	37.0	45
EQA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★☆☆	17.11.21	Competent but entirely average. For the money, we expect better.	8.4	7.6	2030	-	200
GLB 220d 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★⯪☆	16.9.20	Smart looking and practical but its identity feels stretched at times.	7.4	7.1	1810	55.4	-
EQB 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★⯪☆	18.5.22	A versatile premium EV that doesn't easily command its premium.	7.7	6.8	2235	-	-
GLC 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★⯪☆	13.9.23	Shines in places but doesn't notably elevate the GLC proposition.	6.5	6.0	1929	41.2	-
GLS 400d 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★⯪☆	12.2.20	Has much to commend it but not enough to be the S-Class of SUVs.	6.5	6.0	2634	38.2	-
G350d AMG Line	★★★★☆	17.7.19	Customary capability, charm and ego, now with 21st-century luxury.	7.5	7.2	2451	31.3	-
G500 AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★★☆	25.9.24	Anachronistic, iconoclastic and expensive but very hard not to love.	5.1	4.5	–	30.7	-
CLE 300e AMG Line Premium Plus Coupé	★★★★☆	13.11.24	Electrification brings traditional Merc strengths to a desirable mid-sized coupé.	6.1	5.5	2122	37.1	49

MG

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3 1.5 3Form Sport	★★★⯪☆	25.12.13	No slayer of the best mainstream giants but cheap done very cheerfully.	11.4	11.6	1240	41.4	-
3 Hybrid+ Trophy	★★★⯪☆	12.6.24	Good value and with no serious vices but still lacks a final layer of polish.	6.8	6.2	1311	47.9	-
4 EV Long Range SE	★★★★☆	5.4.23	Good value, useful and fun to drive to boot.	7.1	6.1	1692	-	185
5 SW EV Exclusive	★★★⯪☆	25.11.20	MG's second EV does cheap motoring much better than the first.	8.0	7.1	1538	-	161
ZS EV Exclusive	★★★☆☆	4.12.19	Practical, affordable MG fails to truly move the game on.	8.9	8.0	1556	-	113
ZS Hybrid+ Trophy	★★★☆☆	22.1.25	Roomier, cleverer and better-equipped than you would expect for the money.	7.6	6.6	1422	41.5	–

MINI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Countryman C Exclusive	★★★⯪☆	17.4.24	Spacious but sends mixed messages on family-friendly refinement.	8.7	7.7	1618	46.9	-
Aceman SE Exclusive	★★★⯪☆	8.1.25	Compact SUV has the usual Mini charm but limited extra grown-up appeal.	6.8	5.7	1756	3.1	162

MORGAN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Plus Four	★★★⯪☆	12.8.20	Refreshing and fun in that true Morgan way but lacks a little polish.	5.1	4.3	1013	54.0	-
Plus Six	★★★★☆	10.4.24	The individualist's sports car made better.	4.4	3.3	1188	37.2	-
Super 3	★★★★⯪	9.11.22	Adds some subtle modernity to the 3 Wheeler's endless giggles.	6.9	5.9	644	43.5	-

NISSAN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Juke 1.0 DIG-T 117 Tekna	★★★⯪☆	29.1.20	Impressive in some respects but outstanding in few.	11.9	11.8	1256	46.0	-
Qashqai 1.3 DIG-T 158 Tekna	★★★★☆	28.7.21	Ticks the important family car boxes but its powertrain frustrates.	10.0	9.3	1412	44.9	-
Ariya 87kWh Evolve	★★★⯪☆	26.10.22	Surprisingly traditional and luxurious but not wholly successful.	8.2	6.4	2109	-	-
X-Trail e-Power e-4orce AWD Tekna	★★★★☆	22.2.23	Capable all-rounder that deals effortlessly with everyday life.	6.6	6.0	1947	33.8	-

OMODA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
5 1.6 TGDI Comfort	★★⯪☆☆	20.11.24	Chinese SUV has some promise as a purely rational buy but feels under-developed.	7.4	6.3	1474	38.2	-

PEUGEOT

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
e-208 Allure Premium	★★★★☆	6.5.20	Stylish, drivable, usable, reasonably priced – and the best small EV	-	-	1455	38.2	-
308 1.2T Puretech 130 GT	★★★★☆	25.5.22	A reminder of the old Peugeot magic. Small, supple and a bit special.	9.5	9.2	1358	55.3	-

TOP 3

BEST CITY CARS

1 Hyundai i10

2 Kia Picanto

3 Suzuki Ignis

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
408 Hybrid 180 GT e-EAT8	★★★★☆	11.10.23	Novel Peugeot shows an alternative path for the family car.	8.2	7.3	1746	42.1	40
508 BlueHDi 180 S&S GT Auto	★★★★☆	24.10.18	Stylish and likeable but lacking the polish of more premium rivals.	8.8	8.5	1671	52.0	-
508 SW Hybrid 225 S&S Allure e-EAT8	★★★★☆	8.7.20	This is a comfortable car that looks smart and feels classy.	-	-	1720	-	-
508 SW Hybrid4 PSE	★★★★☆	5.5.21	Hits notable handling highs but feels less than sharp elsewhere.	5.7	4.7	1892	44.0	-
e-2008 GT Line	★★★½☆	30.9.20	Cheaper versions impress; pricier ones won't worry class leaders.	9.5	8.9	1638	-	-
3008 1.6 BlueHDi 120 GT Line	★★★½☆	18.1.17	In challenging company, the 3008 promises more than it delivers.	12.0	12.1	1300	53.2	-
e-3008 73kWh Allure	★★★½☆	4.8.24	Electric family SUV is rich, handsome and refined but no technical tour de force.	8.5	7.1	2132	-	219

POLESTAR

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
2 BST Edition 270	★★★½☆	12.4.23	A creditable attempt at electric car thrills, although not quite fully formed.	4.5	3.4	2161	-	188

TOP 3

BEST SEVEN-SEATERS

1 Volvo XC90

2 Dacia Jogger

3 Hyundai Santa Fe

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

PORSCHE

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
718 Boxster	★★★★½	8.6.16	Better than ever objectively, but at the expense of vital subjective appeal.	5.4	4.3	1395	35.9	-
718 Cayman S	★★★★½	10.8.16	Still the greatest sports coupé out there, even if it doesn't sound like it.	4.8	3.9	1430	-	-
718 Cayman GTS	★★★★½	9.5.18	Outstanding in lots of ways but, so far, less Cayman may still be more.	4.8	3.6	1390	39.0	-
718 Spyder	★★★★½	1.4.20	Spyder's flat six rectifies most, if not quite all, of the 718's shortcomings.	4.3	3.5	1350	30.1	-
718 Cayman GT4 RS	★★★★★	14.9.22	A feast of noise, revs, handling poise and thrills. Incredibly special.	3.9	3.0	1444	27.1	-
911 Carrera S	★★★★½	29.5.19	Faster, richer and more competent than the 991, if less vivacious.	3.4	2.8	1525	39.4	-
911 GT3 PDK	★★★★½	11.8.21	Less versatile than some past GT3s but still spectacularly good.	3.4	2.7	1430	29.2	-
911 Turbo S	★★★★½	10.8.22	Has a questionable raison d'être but is engaging and awesomely capable.	2.5	2.0	1640	36.3	-
911 Carrera T	★★★★☆	30.8.23	Sharper 911 has a likeable simplicity but makes key compromises.	4.9	3.8	1456	39.1	-
911 GT3 RS	★★★★½	22.11.23	Esoteric even by hardcore 911 standards but simply monumental.	3.2	2.5	1476	26.7	-
911 Dakar	★★★★☆	10.1.24	Rally-raid-themed throwback charms like no other modern 911.	3.3	2.6	1660	36.0	-
911 S/T	★★★★★	3.7.24	Porsche's GT division alters its recipe to deliver an all-time great.	3.7	2.6	1408	30.9	-
Macan Turbo	★★★★½	4.6.14	Luxury SUV meets sports car in a compact, well-priced package.	4.7	4.3	2050	30.9	-
Cayenne S	★★★★½	21.2.24	Rebooted Cayenne impresses and the charming V8 is our pick.	5.0	4.3	2256	28.8	-
Cayenne Turbo	★★★★☆	5.9.18	As impressive as ever but not quite the driver's car it once was.	3.9	3.4	2307	31.5	-
Cayenne Turbo S E-Hybrid	★★★½☆	27.5.20	Technically impressive but fails to make a convincing case for itself.	-	-	2490	-	-
Cayenne Turbo GT Coupé	★★★★☆	20.7.22	Uncompromising rapid SUV is a bit of a monster – but a likeable one.	3.1	2.7	2251	26.1	-
Panamera 4 E-Hybrid	★★★★☆	22.1.25	Understated plug-in hybrid is a Swiss Army knife super-saloon.	3.8	2.4	2370	30.1	29
Taycan Turbo S	★★★★½	30.10.24	Porsche deftly keeps its superb EV on the boil.	2.6	1.9	2356	2.7	233

RENAULT

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Clio TCe 100 Iconic	★★★★½	27.11.19	Plusher, smoother, more mature. A car of substance as well as style.	11.6	10.9	1138	56.9	-
Mégane E-Tech Techno	★★★½☆	23.11.22	Likeable and eye-catching, but rivals have moved the EV game on.	6.9	5.4	1688	-	198
Captur TCe 130 S-Edition EDC	★★★½☆	18.3.20	Second-generation Captur should prove popular, but not with this powertrain.	9.4	9.2	1363	53.1	-
Arkana E-Tech Hybrid 145 S-Edition	★★★½☆	13.10.21	Showy styling clothes an eminently sensible but unspectacular car.	11.0	10.1	1365	58.3	-
Scenic E-Tech Iconic Long Range	★★★★☆	26.6.24	The Scenic finally conforms but does so with style and substance.	8.1	6.3	1916	-	313
Austral E-Tech Iconic Esprit Alpine	★★★½☆	19.7.23	Clever hybrid and pleasant cabin but let down by clumsy dynamics.	8.5	6.9	1696	43.5	-

ROLLS-ROYCE

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ghost	★★★★½	13.1.21	Most technologically advanced Rolls-Royce is an exceptional limo.	4.7	3.8	2490	28.5	-
Phantom	★★★★★	4.4.18	The world's greatest and finest luxury car is now also the very best.	5.5	4.4	2780	28.4	-
Spectre	★★★★½	20.12.23	Superbly lavish and intoxicatingly refined, if shy of epoch-making.	4.1	3.1	2935	-	245
Cullinan Black Badge	★★★★☆	19.2.20	Far more likeable to drive than look at, for those who have a use for it.	4.9	4.2	2739	23.6	-

SEAT

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ibiza 1.0 TSI SE Technology	★★★★½	19.7.17	Grown-up supermini shows its rivals how it's done – in most respects.	10.0	10.0	1047	55.6	-
Leon eHybrid FR	★★★½☆	2.12.20	Competent and efficient but verges on being forgettable to drive.	7.2	6.2	1558	46.3	26
Arona 1.0 TSI SE Technology	★★★★☆	15.11.17	Polished, mature all-rounder has since lost its class-best crown.	10.5	10.7	1149	40.9	-
Ateca 1.6 TDI Ecomotive SE	★★★★½	19.10.16	Former class leader for all the right reasons – desirability included.	10.5	10.3	1408	-	-
Ateca 1.5 Eco TSI FR Black Edition DSG	★★★☆☆	25.10.23	Once-appealing Nissan Qashqai rival now shows some signs of neglect.	8.9	8.0	1396	44.4	-

SKODA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Fabia 1.0 TSI 95PS SE Comfort	★★★★½	9.2.22	Comfy, spacious and good value, this supermini is Skoda at its best.	9.9	9.7	1117	58.7	-
Scala SE 1.5 TSI 150PS DSG	★★★½☆	31.7.19	Different from the bigger Octavia but perhaps not by enough.	7.9	7.3	1200	52.9	-
Octavia 2.0 TDI 150PS SE L First Edition Estate DSG	★★★★☆	2.9.20	Leads the charge to take Skoda upmarket and mostly succeeds.	8.4	8.7	1510	73.0	-
Octavia Estate vRS	★★★★☆	29.1.25	A fine estate made more engaging rather than a great hot hatch made a bit bigger.	5.9	4.8	–	37.6	-
Superb SE L 2.0 TDI 150PS Estate	★★★★★	17.7.24	The large, functional estate car modernised in all the right ways.	8.4	8.2	1673	68.7	-
Karoq 2.0 TDI 150PS Scout	★★★½☆	30.1.19	Practical, comfortable Skoda is short on charm and dynamic polish.	8.9	9.6	1629	47.1	-
Enyaq iV 80 Lounge	★★★★☆	18.8.21	Practical, rangy, well priced. Hits a sweet spot in the EV market.	8.3	7.8	2098	-	262

SMART

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
#1 Premium	★★★½☆	8.11.23	Drivability frustrations mar an otherwise agreeable experience.	5.6	4.6	1861	-	229
#3 Premium	★★★½☆	15.5.24	Makings of an interesting alternative EV but let down by the finer details.	5.7	4.9	1832	-	205

SUBARU

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Crosstrek 2.0i e-Boxer Touring	★★★½☆	28.2.24	Improved manners for junior off-roader are welcome, if not transformative.	10.4	10.4	1620	45.3	-
Outback 2.5i Lineartronic Touring	★★★½☆	27.9.23	A pretty good answer to a question that only a few people asked.	9.3	8.7	1690	42.8	-
Solterra AWD Touring	★★★☆☆	15.3.23	A hint of Subaru-typical capability doesn't take this EV quite far enough.	6.7	6.2	2051	-	169

SUZUKI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Vitara 1.6 SZ5	★★★½☆	29.4.15	The Vitara is solidly built in Suzuki's image – and that's fine with us.	9.5	9.5	1124	-	-
SX4 S-Cross 1.6 DDiS SZ4	★★★½☆	30.10.13	Quietly capable in most respects and remarkable for its parsimony.	10.0	10.1	1305	67.5	-

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Across 2.5 PHEV E-Four CVT	★★★★⯨	7.4.21	Excellent hybrid powertrain makes it one of the best PHEVs around.	6.4	5.8	1966	44.4	48

TESLA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Model 3 Standard Range Plus	★★★★☆	4.9.19	Wrinkles aside, it offers great electric performance and usability at this price.	5.8	4.7	1633	-	156
Model 3 Long Range	★★★★☆	14.2.24	Packs a real punch. Both updated Model 3s are fine propositions.	4.4	3.4	1846	-	277
Model Y Long Range AWD	★★★★☆	23.3.22	A far better electric car than a premium SUV.	4.7	3.6	1978	-	234
Model S P90D	★★★★⯨	20.4.16	Great EV, intriguing driver's car. Not quite the perfect luxury GT.	3.5	3.0	2220	-	214
Model S Plaid	★★★⯨☆	2.8.23	Astonishing pace but not a fully rounded performance saloon.	2.4	1.7	2220	-	301
Model X 90D	★★★★☆	15.2.17	High-rise EV strains under SUV brief but still feels like a history maker.	5.2	4.2	2508	-	147

TOYOTA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Aygo X Limited Edition	★★★⯨☆	11.5.22	A mostly very grown-up small car but also an expensive one.	15.6	16.5	974	58.7	-
Yaris 1.5 Hybrid Design	★★★★☆	23.9.20	Grows not only in stature but also in ability and subjective appeal.	9.2	8.8	1140	65.0	-
GR Yaris Circuit Pack	★★★★★	3.3.21	Toyota, on a roll with driver's cars, provides yet another winner.	5.2	5.0	1283	39.2	-
Corolla 2.0 Hybrid Design Touring Sports	★★★★☆	5.6.19	A big step up for Toyota in a vital sector and a better hybrid to boot.	8.5	7.7	1537	52.6	-
bZ4X AWD Vision	★★★⯨☆	18.1.23	A decent effort all round but not exceptional in any way.	6.4	5.9	2023	-	208
Mirai Design Premium	★★★★☆	16.6.21	Impressive hydrogen fuel cell car has made strides but remains hamstrung overall.	8.7	8.3	1937	-	-
GR Supra Pro	★★★★☆	14.8.19	Fast, usable and has plenty going for it but leaves us wanting more.	4.4	3.6	1495	39.0	-
Hilux 2.8 D-4D GR Sport	★★★⯨☆	1.3.23	Gazoo-branded Ford Ranger Raptor rival is formidable but lacks fun factor.	10.0	9.5	2241	32.5	-

VAUXHALL

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Corsa 1.2 Turbo 100PS Ultimate Nav Auto	★★★⯨☆	22.1.20	Supermini is improved in many ways but lacks the appeal to match its price.	11.2	11.5	1171	51.8	-
Astra 1.2 Turbo 130PS GS Line	★★★⯨☆	5.10.22	Family hatchback's gentle push upmarket is only a qualified success.	9.9	9.2	1304	55.3	-
Crossland X 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite	★★★☆☆	7.6.17	Typically practical and well priced, but Vauxhall can do better.	9.8	10.3	1278	54.2	-
Mokka 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite Nav Premium Auto	★★★⯨☆	12.5.21	The driving experience sells a brave design effort just a little short.	9.3	9.1	1238	48.6	-
Grandland X Hybrid4 Ultimate Nav	★★★☆☆	22.4.20	Inspires big expectations and delivers few, but it's an interesting fleet option.	-	-	1800	-	-
Combo Life 1.5 Turbo D 100PS Energy	★★★⯨☆	27.12.18	Usable, spacious and practical, if not very pretty to look at.	14.7	16.2	1552	60.1	-

VOLKSWAGEN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Polo 1.0 TSI 95PS SE	★★★★⯨	31.1.18	Brings 'big car' space, class, kit and finish to this class like never before.	10.7	11.2	1145	57.1	-
Polo 2.0 TSI GTI+	★★★★☆	1.8.18	A usable, quick and vastly competent effort but not the most thrilling.	6.7	5.9	1342	46.8	-
Golf 1.5 eTSI 150PS Style DSG	★★★★⯨	22.7.20	Additional strengths and familiar ones carry it back to the class lead.	8.3	7.8	1330	60.0	-
Golf 1.5 TSI eHybrid Style	★★★★⯨	23.10.24	New plug-in Golf takes the PHEV hatchback's status to greater heights.	7.2	6.1	1619	46.5	-
Golf GTI	★★★⯨☆	25.9.24	'Mk8.5' version of hot hatchback is slick and effective but not a big enough step forward.	5.3	4.4	-	47.2	-
Golf R	★★★★☆	14.4.21	Most entertaining distillation of the Golf R formula yet – for a price.	4.4	3.7	1520	43.9	-
ID 3 Pro Performance Life	★★★★☆	31.3.21	Bland but with the substance to further the zero-emissions push.	7.0	6.5	1757	-	145
Arteon 2.0 BiTDI 240PS 4Motion R-Line	★★★⯨☆	27.9.17	Considered approach produces an executive flagship short on sparkle.	6.5	6.2	1866	55.6	-
Arteon eHybrid Elegance Shooting Brake	★★★⯨☆	9.6.21	Striking PHEV appears radical but upholds Volkswagen's traditions at heart.	7.1	6.0	1783	52.5	-
ID 7 Pro Match	★★★★⯨	13.3.24	Volkswagen finds some electric form in an unexpected format.	6.1	5.1	2162	-	239
T-Roc 2.0 TSI 190PS 4Motion SEL DSG	★★★★⯨	24.1.18	Shows performance verve, dynamic completeness and stylish swagger.	6.7	6.5	1534	37.5	-
T-Roc 1.5 TSI Evo R-Line Cabriolet DSG	★★⯨☆☆	10.6.20	It brings little worth having to the compact cabriolet niche.	-	-	1540	-	-
Tiguan 1.5 eTSI 150PS R-Line	★★★⯨☆	22.5.24	Functional and mature, but this isn't the engine or trim we would go for.	9.4	9.2	1606	44.9	-
ID 4 GTX Max	★★★⯨☆	27.10.21	GTX adds flavour to ID 4 but doesn't reimagine 'GTI' for the EV age.	6.2	5.6	2220	-	200
Touareg 3.0 TDI 4Motion R-Line Tech	★★★⯨☆	8.8.18	An inoffensive if forgettable bid at a luxury market breakthrough.	7.2	6.6	2292	41.6	-
Touareg 3.0 TSI eHybrid 4Motion Elegance	★★★⯨☆	5.6.24	It's versatile and likeably unpretentious but won't be a default company car choice.	6.2	5.7	2446	34.1	26
Touran 2.0 TDI 150PS SE Family DSG	★★★★☆	3.2.16	A spacious, refined and classy all-rounder – albeit a slightly bland one.	9.9	9.7	1666	-	-
Multivan 1.4 eHybrid Style	★★★★☆	8.3.23	Latest Volkswagen ’bus combines the best bits of both car and van.	8.4	7.1	2243	37.9	14
ID Buzz 77kWh Style Pro	★★★★☆	8.2.23	It costs plenty but offers versatility and luxury accomplishments.	9.5	9.1	2498	-	185
Grand California 600	★★★⯨☆	2.1.20	Grandest California is classy but not half as clever as its smaller namesake.	15.8	16.7	3095	28.5	-
Transporter Sportline Black Edition Kombi SWB	★★★☆☆	30.3.22	Not compromised but hardly enhanced by its sporting agenda.	9.1	9.0	2108	39.1	-
Passat eHybrid 204PS Elegance	★★★★☆	13.11.24	Rounded and with good PHEV credentials, but less compelling than its sister car.	7.2	6.4	1836	44.5	73

VOLVO

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
EX30 Single Motor Extended Range Plus	★★★☆☆	1.5.24	Not enough key strengths – and not enough Volvo pragmatism.	5.7	5.1	1779	-	179
C40 Recharge Twin Ultimate	★★★⯨☆	13.4.22	A transitional model for Volvo that doesn't go quite far enough.	4.4	3.6	2172	-	194
XC40 D4 AWD First Edition	★★★★⯨	7.2.18	Wieldy, classy and simple. As good as its bigger brothers, if not better.	8.5	8.5	1735	43.8	-
XC60 D4 AWD R-Design	★★★⯨☆	5.7.17	The right product at the right time but lacking the right dynamic finish.	8.9	8.9	1836	48.9	-
XC90 D5 AWD Momentum	★★★★☆	17.6.15	A very impressive all-rounder with its own distinctive appeal.	8.3	8.3	2076	-	-
V60 D4 Momentum Pro Auto	★★★★☆	27.6.18	Fine-looking, capable and practical estate with only a few demerits.	8.9	8.3	1669	43.1	-
V60 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design	★★★★⯨	21.9.22	Strong hybrid system gives ageing Volvo a lot of fresh appeal.	4.9	4.3	2036	38.0	51
V90 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design	★★★★⯨	11.11.20	Hardly revolutionary but exceptionally appealing nonetheless.	5.6	4.9	2109	41.9	-

WHAT'S COMING WHEN

Aston Vanquish Volante July
V12 drop-top could nudge two tonnes but pace will be mighty.

AUTOCAR IMAGE

Hyundai Ioniq 6 N December
Hot electric saloon should get 5 N's trick 'manual' gearbox.

Merc-AMG CLE 63 November
No PHEV here! Instead, it has AMG's 4.0-litre twin-turbo V8.

SCAN THE CODE FOR THE FULL LIST

Why I love...
MOTOR FACTORS

BY FELIX PAGE

Unless you're the sort of driver who makes an appointment at a local garage for a new wiper blade, you may be familiar with the sometimes aggravating process of finding and purchasing car parts.

It goes something like this: let's make up a completely random fake scenario and imagine that your 1993 Peugeot 405 1.9 TD GTX Estate needs a new indicator relay a couple of days before you're due to drive from Kent to Toulouse.

You lift the bonnet, locate the relay panel, identify the offending part that refuses to tick and tock like it should and note down its number. Then you head online – and are confronted by a dizzying array of relays that look a bit but not exactly like the one you need, at wildly different prices and all subject to a delivery fee far greater than the cost of the part itself. You will wait five to seven days for some of them, maybe a few weeks if it's coming from another hemisphere. The sellers all have names like TopCarPartsNow4UDirectCheap and worryingly low feedback ratings.

Dejected, you visit a big-name parts supplier chain and explain your quandary. They ask for your car's numberplate before telling you it's not a match in their system and sending you down the road to the local branch of a well-known purveyor of bicycles and roof racks, from which you will inevitably emerge empty-handed.

But then you call in at the independent motor factor on the high street. It has been there since Grandad had his Granada and stocks more varieties of Jubilee clips than Liberty does perfumes. Crates of mismatched HT leads dangle precariously from on high, huge cans of Valvoline litter the floor and a Rover 25's fuel pump drips slowly onto the wooden worktop. There are brands of spark plug stocked here that haven't been relevant since the Cold War.

Parts linger here for years, ready for when someone eventually needs them

It's a mysterious mess to us, but it all makes sense to the chap behind the till

> **"405, is it? Three-pin relay, yeah? Think the 205 had four"**

But chummy boy behind the till knows exactly what he's doing. "405, is it?" he grins, as he picks a box seemingly at random and rifles through a seemingly impenetrable pile of yellowing freezer bags, pausing only to squint every so often at an indecipherable felt-tip squiggle on their labels.

"That's the puppy," he says, as he tips this most elusive of electronics into your palm. "Three-pin, yeah? Think the 205 had four." You can only nod wordlessly, gobsmacked that the holy grail you had worked so hard to find was two miles down the road this whole time, no doubt having been safely ensconced in this sage's collection since not long after the 405 was launched.

He even lets you run outside to make sure it works, unbothered by the prospect of a few scuffs on the gold terminals, and is unsurprised when it does. "Be all right for a few years, that," he remarks, sipping his tea and logging the purchase in biro on a tatty notepad next to the till. Presumably he now urgently needs to replenish his stock of 405 indicator relays.

And the price for salvation? "Call it a fiver, mate – and take a couple of those fuses just in case." Forget fancy dealership coffees and over-the-air updates: this is peak aftersale support, and a rare automotive pleasure denied to anyone who doesn't muck about with old motors.

Support your local and make sure they stick around for years to come. Who knows? Maybe one day you will need a cambelt for your Cupra or some brake pads for your BYD, and there will be someone who knows just which tub they're in.

What we did this week

LOOK, MA!

I've just driven 130 miles in a Ford Mustang Mach-E Rally and for only 10 of them did I need to have my hands on the wheel. Happily, I found that BlueCruise – the eyes-on, hands-off semi-automated driving mode that Ford introduced on the Mach-E a while back – works for most of my commute on the M3. What a brilliant bit of kit that seems to have been forgotten about.

WILL RIMELL

CHANNEL HOPPING

A thoroughly enjoyable Eurotunnel journey recently, having not been on it since 2019. However, less enjoyable was driving a Kia EV9 into the standard-sized carriages. Look! Just millimetres to spare... Thankfully they were high-profile tyres, so no damage was done to the alloys – which was particularly lucky, since Kia UK's PR boss was right behind me.

RACHEL BURGESS

VIRTUAL INSANITY

Superb multi-tasking on a Zoom interview with Citroën CEO Thierry Koskas. His train was delayed, so he joined on his phone, strolled through Amsterdam to his hotel, checked in, put on a tie and came back downstairs before leaving us to join a meeting. He was fluent throughout, never paused or misspoke and delivered some great quotes for a story. What a performance.

MARK TISSHAW

THIERRY KOSKAS

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